

S E R M O N S

Upon the following

S U B J E C T S.

The Natural Advantages of Men for attaining to the Knowledge and Practice of Religion.

The true Excellency of Men. The weightier Matters of Religion.

The Government of the Heart. The Spiritual and true Worship of God.

The external Duties of religious Worship, and positive Rites of Christianity.

The Nature of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the Excellency of Charity above Faith and Hope.

The Evidence of a future Judgment, and its Influence for engaging Men to Repentance.

The Tendency of Christianity to promote the Happiness of Mankind in this present Life.

The Loving our Saviour above all the Objects of our Affection in this World.

The peculiar Advantages of our Saviour's Doctrine.

The Excellency of an inquisitive Disposition, and the Right, Duty, and Advantages of inquiring into Matters of Religion.

Christianity capable of a rational Defence, the Duty of every Man to defend it, and the proper Methods of Supporting it.

The Spiritual and Moral Liberty of Men.

By *JOHN ORR*, M. A. *R.*

Rector of *Maryborough*, in the Diocese of *Leighlin*.

V O L. I.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

E D W A R D,

LORD BISHOP of ELPHIN,

THE FOLLOWING

S E R M O N S,

(In this SECOND EDITION of Them)

A S A

Testimony of RESPECT and GRATITUDE,

ARE HUMBLY INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST DUTIFUL,

MOST OBEDIENT, AND OBLIGED SERVANT,

JOHN ORR.

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To the Right Reverend

E D W A R D

Lord Bishop of ELPHIN

THE FOLLOWING

S E R M O N S

(In this Series)



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JOHN ORR

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matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy and
Faith : These ought ye to have done, and
not to leave the other undone.*

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S E R M O N I.

The natural Advantages of Men for
attaining to the Knowledge and
Practice of Religion.

R O M. II. 14, 15.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law; these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves: which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts; their Conscience also bearing witness, and their Thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.

THIS Account, which St. Paul gives us of the *Gentiles*, will afford us some matter of useful Reflection, after we have considered, what it is, that he here affirms of them, and seen how his Assertions can be justified, or the Truth of them made out.

VOL. I.

When

SERM. *When the Gentiles, says he, which have not*

I. *the Law, that is, when the Heathens, who*
 have no revealed Law, who have had no Scheme or Instruction of Religion delivered to them by Divine Teachers and Instructors, as the *Jews and Christians* have had, *do by Nature the things contained in the Law*; do from the Instincts and Propensions of Humanity, and from the Suggestions of Reason and Conscience, practise the several Duties of Piety, Justice, Compassion, and Charity, which are the great things, which the instituted Law of God requires; *These having not the law, are a Law unto themselves*: These Gentiles, tho' they have not the advantage of a positive revealed Law, yet are not at a loss about the Rule of their Duty, but find that, and their Obligation to observe it, by consulting their own Hearts, and see what things are to be performed, and what are to be avoided by them: *Which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts*, who plainly discover, that they have true Notions of Good and Evil, of a right and a wrong Conduct, implanted in their Minds; and likewise a natural Disposition to perform the good Actions, which the positive Law requires, *their Conscience also bearing witness*; their Consciences inspecting their whole Behaviour, and applauding them
 when

when they act right, and admonishing and SERM.
reproving them when they do wrong: *And* I.
their Thoughts the mean while accusing, or else }
excusing one another; or, as the original Words
are otherwise rendered, *and they in the Reason-*
ings of their Minds, or in the Reflections,
which they make upon one another's Conduct,
approving or condemning each other, accord-
ing as their Behaviour is formed upon the
Principles of Piety, Honesty, and Goodness,
or the contrary.

So that the Sum of what St. *Paul* asserts,
is, that the *Heathen* Nations, who have had
no extraordinary Revelation communicated to
them, but are left to the Notices and Sug-
gestions of Nature, for the direction of their
Conduct, do in the use of those Advantages,
which they are naturally possessed of, attain in
some measure both to the Knowledge and
Practice of their Duty. Their Faculties clearly
suggest to them a difference between moral
Good and Evil, and teach them to adhere to
the one, and to abstain from the other; and
the Propensions of their Hearts incline them
to those Actions, which their Minds approve:
and they cannot turn to another Course of Life,
without violating the Law of their Nature,
and falling under the Reproaches of their own

SERM. Minds, as well as the Censures and Condemnation of the rest of Mankind.

I.

Now this Representation, which the Apostle has given of the State of the *Gentile* World, is certainly very just, and perfectly agreeable both to the Reason and Experience of Mankind.

If we consider what the Condition of the *Heathen* Nations, or of that part of Mankind, who have never been favoured with the Light of supernatural Revelation, may rationally be presumed with respect to Religion to be, we must certainly conclude, that tho' they want several Advantages, which we, who have the Benefit of such a Revelation, enjoy, yet they are not left altogether in a State of Darkness and Uncertainty as to the Duties, which must be performed by them in order to their pleasing God, and obtaining the proper Happiness of their Nature; but that they always have the Means in their power, if they will rightly improve them, of knowing and doing their Duty, and in consequence of that, of enjoying Happiness both in this and in a future State. It is not at all reconcileable to the Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness of God, to suppose, that he would deal more hardly with the principal Inhabitants of this World, than he has done with the inferior sorts of Creatures: that he would deny to the greatest
part

for attaining the Knowledge of Religion.

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part of Mankind the means of acting agree- SERM.
ably to the Nature, which he has given them, I.

and of attaining to that Happiness, of which
he has made them capable : that he would
put them into such Circumstances, that they
must necessarily remain ignorant of those
things, which they are most concerned to
know and do, and live just at random, with-
out a Law to govern them, without any Prin-
ciple to controul and check them in their
mistaken Pursuits, only blindly to follow the
Impulse of every prevailing passion whither-
soever it may lead them, to the ruin and
destruction, perhaps, both of themselves and
others. This Conduct is by no means wor-
thy of the wise, and merciful, and righteous
Father and Governour of Mankind, and can
be thought agreeable only to some capricious
malevolent Being, who cruelly sported him-
self with the Distress and Misery of great
multitudes of helpless Creatures. It may
therefore be laid down as a Principle with all,
who acknowledge a wise, just, and benevo-
lent Deity, as the Author and Governour of
the World, that he has imparted so much
Light to the *Gentile* Nations, as is necessary
for directing them to a rational and good Con-
duct, and shewing them the true way to
Happiness; and that it must be owing to

SERM. their own Negligence in not attending to,
 I. and in not improving this Light, if they fall
 short of that State of Perfection and Felicity,
 for which the Author of their Beings designed them.

This is what, I think, we may rest in, upon a bare View of the Perfections of the Supreme Being, before we have taken the real Case of the *Heathen* Nations into our Consideration. And when we consider what that is, we find, that it is just what we might before have rationally presumed it to be; that tho' they want the Benefit of a positive Revelation, yet they are not therefore deprived of the Means of living as becomes rational Creatures and moral Agents; but that in the Use of their natural Powers, and of those Advantages, which Providence allows them, they may both discern and practice their Duty; and that many of them, in proportion to their Circumstances, do actually behave themselves very innocently and virtuously.

It is not to be expected, that in a Discourse of this nature, I should enter minutely into a Consideration of all the various Powers and Advantages, which Mankind are possessed of, exclusively of Revelation, for investigating the Principles, and performing the Duties, of Religion and Morality, I shall only take notice of
 some

some of the principal Talents and Advantages, SERM.
which the wise and good Author of Nature I.
has given in common to the whole human
Race, in order to their discovering and doing
his Will, and thereby rendering themselves
acceptable to him, and attaining to the End,
for which he has made them.

1. The Faculty of Reason is one of those
common Gifts of the great Creator, which
enables Mankind to make great Discoveries in
Religion. By the Use of this, they come to
know the Existence of the infinite eternal
Mind; can trace the several Perfections of his
Nature, his Providence and Government of
the World; and see what sort of Worship and
Service must be most acceptable to him from
his intelligent Creatures. The Existence of
a Deity is certainly one of the most easy and
obvious Deductions of human Reason, from
the Contemplation of the Universe, which
bears the most evident Impressions of the in-
exhaustible Power, Wisdom, Righteousness,
and Goodness of him, who made and governs
it. Accordingly we find, that Mankind have
been always prone to believe and acknowledge
a supreme Mind of infinite Wisdom, Power,
Sanctity, and Benevolence, the Creator and
Governour of all things; and that *Atheism*
was accounted as unnatural and monstrous an

SERM. Opinion in *Heathen*, as it has ever been in

I. *Christian Countries*. It would be an easy matter, if this was a proper Place for it, to shew, from the Writings of Philosophers and Historians, the general Concurrence of Mankind, of the Rude and Illiterate, as well as the Civilized and Learned, in acknowledging the Being and Providence, and all the principal Attributes of God; and that they have thought very ill of the Few, who seemed either to deny or doubt of the Truth of these great Articles of Religion. But I shall only observe here, that, according to the Opinion of

Acts xiv. 17. *St. Paul, God never left himself without Witness to any Nation, in that he did them good, and gave them Rain from Heaven, and fruitful Seasons, and filled their Hearts with Food and Gladness; and that he discovered himself to the Gentiles, by the Works which he has made, which afford a clear Demonstration to all, who attend to them, of his eternal Power and Godhead.*

Rom. i. 20. *And when Men are once convinced, that there is a God, and know what Attributes belong to him, they may upon very little Reasoning and Reflection see what the Worship is, that is most agreeable to him from his rational Creatures: that a Being infinitely perfect can never be delighted with those things, which are only fit to amuse the weakest*

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for attaining the Knowledge of Religion.

of Mortals, such as vain and idle Notions, bo- SERM.
dily Penances and Austerities, costly Sacri- I.
fices, and any Services of mere Pomp and Ceremony; but that the thing, which he takes pleasure in, is the Religion of the Heart, an inward Reverence and Love of his own Perfections, an entire Obedience and Submission of the Soul to his Will, a Disposition to imitate his Nature, and to do good after the Example of his indulgent and kind Condescensions to his Creatures. This is what every one, who makes any rational Reflections on the Nature of God, must easily perceive to be the truest and most acceptable Method of serving him. And indeed in this Notion of Divine Worship, the wiser and more considerate Persons among the *Heathens* always agreed; who, as appears from the Accounts, which we have of their Sentiments, greatly despised the vain and absurd Superstition of the Vulgar, and placed the Essence of Religion and the true Worship of God, in a Purity of Heart and Affection, in an Integrity of Mind before God, in Love, Gratitude, and Obedience to him, and a Resemblance of his Excellencies; and in a generous Honesty and Love of Mankind.

And as by the Use and Exercise of Reason, Men come thus to know the Existence
and

SERMON. and Attributes of God, and understand the

I. Nature of that Worship, which is to be offered to him; so by the same Means they may obtain a just Knowledge of their own Nature and Condition, and see what Course of Life is necessary both for supporting their present State, and advancing the Dignity and Happiness of their Nature in the whole Extent of their Existence. Indeed a considerable part of our Knowledge of human Nature arises from the Information of the external Senses, and an inward Perception and Consciousness of what passes within ourselves; by which we know both the outward Form of the Body, and the various Organs and Members, of which it is composed; and the several Powers and Affections inherent in the Soul. And what is wanting after this to make us more thoroughly acquainted with ourselves, may be supplied by our Reason, which, upon taking a Survey of our Constitution, can easily point out the Uses of our several Powers and Dispositions, and consequently the End, for which we ourselves were made; which teaches us particularly, that Mankind were formed for Religion, or the Worship of that great and good Being, upon whom they themselves and all other things depend, and for Society in this World,
and

for attaining the Knowledge of Religion.

II

and are by Nature constituted Members of it; SERM.
that they are under a Necessity of entering in- I.
to, and of cultivating a social State, both for ~
their own Preservation, and in pursuance of
the most generous and honourable Desires and
Affections of their Hearts; and that to main-
tain the Happiness of this State, it is the Duty
of all Men to attend to the Interest of the
Publick, and to take every Opportunity of
promoting it; and to be not only just, but
compassionate, friendly, and obliging to one
another, in the whole Commerce and Business
of Life. But Reason can make a more im-
portant Discovery with respect to Mankind,
than any relating to their Condition in this
World; which is, that they are to exist in
another Life; and to be placed there either
in a State of the greatest Dignity and Happi-
ness, or of insupportable Infamy and Misery,
according to the Improvement, which they
have here made in Piety and Goodness, or
the contrary. This great Doctrine of a future
State, if not strictly demonstrable from rational
Principles, is at least supported by such strong
Presumptions, from the Nature and Operations
of the human Mind itself, and from the Perfec-
tions of the Supreme Being, compared with the
Administration and Order of the World, as make
it most worthy of the Attention of Mankind,
and

SERM. and must indeed render it highly credible

I. in the Judgment of the most wise and impartial Inquirers. Accordingly it appears in fact, that, however some of the meaner Philosophers denied the Truth of this Doctrine, yet the most celebrated among them always believed and taught it, as appearing at least much more probable to them than the contrary: Nay, even the unlearned part of Mankind have always found the notion of a future State so agreeable to their natural Apprehensions and Hopes, and their Sentiments of the Goodness and Justice of Providence, that no Principle of Religion has been more universally admitted and received than this has been.

2. Another common Advantage of Mankind, for attaining both to the Knowledge and Practice of their Duty, is the Principle of natural Conscience, which gives them a quick and immediate perception of moral Good and Evil, and directs them to the one, and restrains them from the other. That there is this Power or Principle of Conscience in our Minds, making us to approve of certain Qualities and Actions as good, and to condemn others as evil, by a sort of natural Prevention, antecedently to all reasoning about those Qualities and Actions, and all Apprehensions of Advantage or Disadvantage to ourselves from them, is a thing, which every one may be convinced

vinced of, from his inward Feeling and Experience, and the Observations, that he makes upon the Conduct of Mankind. The force of this Principle is greater or less in particular Persons, according as they have improved or impaired the strength of it, by hearkening to its Suggestions and Admonitions, or by endeavouring to stifle and suppress them. When Men gladly follow the directions of Conscience, and take it for the guide of Life, it will be a very sure and effectual Principle of Piety and Virtue in them : but when they endeavour artfully to mislead it, and evade the Obligations, which it lays upon them ; when they obstinately resist and act contrary to its Efforts and Convictions, it comes in time to lose much of its natural Power and Influence upon them : And yet when it has been most suppressed and borne down, it can never be utterly extinguished, but will always retain some Power over Men. The very worst cannot entirely throw off the Authority, or free themselves from all the Restraints of Conscience. For though it is not strong enough for recovering such Persons to a just Sense of their Duty, yet it will not fail to give them some Checks and Interruptions in their vicious Pursuits, and prevent their running the utmost lengths in Wickedness, to which Passions altogether loose and

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SERM.
I.
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SERM. unrestrained might carry them. Besides that

I. there are times, in which this Principle, let
 Men do what they can to prevent it, will perfectly revive and recover its full force in them; as when Adversity has broken the force of their Passions, and softened their Minds, and brought them to a serious and thoughtful State, Conscience will certainly assert its Right, and assume its proper Office in laying their Duty very plainly and fully before them, and in accusing and upbraiding them most severely for the Iniquity and Wickedness of their Lives. It is by this Faculty, that Men are most properly *a Law to themselves*. The Dictates of Conscience are the Rule of Right written in their Hearts, which, whether they will or no, they must frequently attend to; and which they cannot transgress, without undergoing a terrible Punishment in the Anguish, Remorse, and Condemnation of their own Minds, which are Evils, that will more or less pursue and torment them, till their Consciences are appeased and quieted by sincere Repentance and Reformation.

3. There are generous Instincts implanted in the human Nature, which incline and lead Men to practise the Duties, which they owe both to God and Man. That there are Propensions or Affections in our Hearts, determining

for attaining the Knowledge of Religion.

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SERM.

I.

ing us, previously to all Views of Interest, and often to all Reflections upon them, and to all Perception of moral Beauty and Goodness in them, to consult the Happiness of Mankind, and to do the Actions, that we apprehend to be pleasing to the Supreme Being, is likewise a Matter, which we may be satisfied is true, from our Experience and Knowledge of ourselves, and our Observations of the Actions of Men, a considerable part of which evidently flow from these Affections. Indeed, these generous Propensions are so remarkable in many Instances of natural Affection, Compassion, Friendship, Gratitude, and Love of a Country, that they are readily discerned and acknowledged by every plain common Man, who attends to the Motions of Nature, and is not prepossessed with the Schemes of some Philosophers, who pretending to a deep Knowledge of the Constitution of Man, have attempted to explain away many of our most obvious Desires and Affections, and to resolve them, by some very fine and subtle Trains of Argument, into Principles, with which they are not at all connected. And tho' the Operation of these social Dispositions is not so discernible in Cases, which do not so nearly affect us, yet they may be still perceived to have some Effect in the most distant relations among Men. We
are

SERMON. are plainly formed with a Disposition of Benevolence to the whole Human Kind, which gives us a sympathizing Sense of the Distresses and Miseries of those, to whom we are no way united by any particular Determinations of Nature, who are utter Strangers to us, whom we hear of at a great distance, and consider only as Men, as Creatures endowed with the same Powers, and susceptible of the same Pleasures and Pains with ourselves; and which makes us to rejoice in the Prosperity of any part of Mankind, and to wish well to their general Interest, whenever we reflect upon such an Object, and to be always ready to do whatever may be in our power to advance and secure it. Nay, our Benevolence is not confined to our own Species, but exerts itself in Desires at least of Happiness to all Natures, that are capable of enjoying it; and it extends more especially to the great Father and Governour of the Universe, making us to take the utmost delight in the Contemplation of his Perfections, and disposing us to do every thing, that is expressive of our Respect and Gratitude to him, and that we know to be agreeable to him; particularly to concur in the Measures, which he has laid down for promoting the universal Happiness of the Creation, with which his own Happiness seems very

pro-

probably to have a close Connection. Thus SERM.
are Mankind formed for the practice of I.
Virtue, and led to their Duty by the kind In-
stincts and Affections of Humanity. It must
be owned indeed, that these Affections do not
operate steadily and regularly in the greatest
part of Men, because they neglect to cultivate
and strengthen them, and suffer themselves
to be misled by their selfish Passions, which
check and bear down their generous Inclina-
tions in many Instances, where they ought
to be exerted. It is however undeniable,
that in the midst of all that Confusion in
which the Passions of Mankind at present
appear to be, the benevolent Dispositions of
Nature have usually a considerable Efficacy
for engaging them to many Acts of Religion
and Piety, and to a pretty punctual Perfor-
mance of the Duties required from them at
least in the nearer Relations of Life. These
Dispositions being essential parts of our Consti-
tution, will of course have their turn among
other natural Principles, in influencing the
Conduct of Men, even when they are at no
pains to cultivate them, when they have no
sense of any great Worth and Goodness in
them, and when they act by no Rule but that
of gratifying every prevailing Inclination: And
when Men are careful to improve and streng-

SERM. then these generous Affections, by reflecting

I. frequently on the great Dignity and Excellence of them, and attending to the amiable Perfections of God, and the good Qualities of Mankind; and when they make way for the Exercise of them, by acquiring a just Knowledge of their own Interest, and the Interest of all other Beings to whom they are related, they will be the Springs of a steady and uniform Virtue in them, and engage them to the most noble and worthy Actions.

4. Lastly, There is a Principle of Self-love natural to Mankind, which, under the direction of Reason, likewise leads them to the practice of Virtue and Religion. That a Desire of our own Happiness, is a strong inextinguishable Principle in our Nature, I need not attempt to prove: It is a thing of which every one has a lively Sense and Conviction in himself. This Principle indeed in itself is but a blind Guide, and when it is not conducted by the superior Faculties of the Mind, instead of engaging Men to their Duty, it is very often the cause of their forsaking it: For a great, perhaps the greatest part of the Corruption and Wickedness of Mankind, arises evidently from their Self-love exerted towards a wrong Object, or something in which they falsely imagine their Interest to consist. But when

when Reason is called in to the Direction of **SERM.**
his Principle; when Men do not act from it **I.**
till they have formed a true Opinion of their
own Happiness, and know the Value and Mo-
ment of the several Objects of their Desires for
promoting it; their Self-love will then co-
operate with the nobler Principles of their Na-
ture, and lead them to the same course of
Life which their Consciences approve and re-
commend, and which their benevolent Af-
fections are designed to engage them to. For
whoever carefully considers and compares to-
gether the various Pleasures and Enjoyments
that make up his Happiness, must certainly
be convinced that the greatest and most valu-
able of them, are those which arise from the
Exercise of Piety, Justice, and Humanity;
that from hence he receives a pure and un-
mixed Joy, and which is withal substantial
and solid, which does not immediately vanish,
but is constantly repeated and renewed by the
Approbation of his own Mind upon every Re-
view of his Conduct; which is greatly height-
ened by the Congratulation, Esteem, and
Friendship of the wisest and best of Men;
and which is likewise accompanied with many
valuable external Advantages: Whereas the
greatest Uneasiness, the most real and lasting
Torment of Mind, together with Infamy and

SER.M. Dishonour, and the loss of Health and Fortune
 I. are most usually the Attendants of a contrary
 Behaviour. So that the Duty and true Interest of Mankind are strictly united even in this World: And if we look forward to that future State, of which Reason makes at least a very probable Discovery, we must certainly conclude from all the Notions that we can have of the Order of that State, that Virtue and Happiness will be still more closely and inseparably connected there, and that the one will be the constant Attendant and Reward of the other; while Vice will be the means of exposing Men to more grievous and intolerable Sufferings, than any they have ever here endured. Thus must the Self-love of Men, if conducted by a just view of their own Happiness, make them above all things desirous to improve in Piety and Virtue, and lead them to the same practice in Life, which the higher and more noble Principles in their Minds direct and prompt them to: And none but those who do not understand, or do not attend to the things which conduce most to their Welfare, can ever allow themselves to go on in a course of Vice, which is not more inconsistent with the Duty which they owe to God, and the Interest of Mankind, than it is with a rational

rational Love of themselves, and their own truest Happiness. SERM.

I.

These are the principal Powers and Advantages with which Mankind are universally furnished, for attaining to the Knowledge and Practice of their Duty ; and in the use of these, together with some particular Helps arising from good Education and Instruction, from an Acquaintance with rational Schemes of Philosophy, and from wise Institutions of civil Polity ; and above all, from that divine Influence, which very probably extends in some measure to all Persons of honest and good Minds ; some have actually arrived at a great Height and Perfection in Virtue, and the greatest part of Men have usually had some Sense of the main Principles of Religion, and have in some degree performed the Duties of it. It is indeed very certain, that the Generality of Mankind do not make that good Use and Improvement of the noble Powers and Dispositions of Nature which might be made of them ; they are far from exercising their Reason carefully for framing any thing like a just and well-digested Scheme of Religion, or for finding out the true Measures of their Duty, and the Means of promoting their own Happiness, but are too apt to resign their Understandings to those who have the Art of enslaving them,

SERM. and to receive implicitly all current Opinions,

I.  however false and foolish they may be ; they do not steadily attend to the Judgment of Conscience concerning the Good or Evil of their Conduct, nor act regularly in Obedience to its Directions, and in pursuance of the honest and kind Propensions of their Hearts, but are easily carried into different Pursuits through the Influence of ungoverned Appetites and Passions : And from hence it is, that a great deal of Ignorance, Absurdity, and Superstition, and withal a great deal of Wickedness and Immorality abounds among them. But notwithstanding this, it is not perhaps possible for Men to sink so far into Ignorance and Barbarity, as to retain no Knowledge of Religion, and no regard to the practice of it : The Evidences of the main Articles of Religion are so clear and strong, that they sometimes shine through all the Darkeness in which the Errors and Prejudices of Mankind involve them, and force themselves into every Understanding that is at all capable of perceiving them ; and the Dispositions from whence the Duties of it flow, are interwoven in our Make and Constitution, so that unless Men put off their Nature, or divest themselves of their most essential Powers and Properties, there must be always something of the practice of Piety and Virtue among them. The Principle



principle of Conscience is itself sufficient to keep some sense of Religion alive in the Minds of Men ; and in fact this Principle, in conjunction with their benevolent Affections, engages the generality of them, in the midst of all their Corruptions, to many worthy and commendable Actions ; indeed to a great many more, than those who are always full of melancholy Thoughts, and uneasy Suspicions about the extreme depravation and wickedness of the World, are apt to imagine. This is in a great measure evident from the Consideration of that Order, Tranquillity, and Happiness which subsist in the several Communities and various Relations of Mankind, which could never be maintained, in the degree in which they prevail, merely by external Force or the Fear of human Punishment, if there were not some internal Principles in Men, which freely determined them to the Actions necessary for the preservation of them.

I come now to make some useful Reflections, which this Subject will naturally afford us.

1. We may here take notice of the great and extensive Goodness of God to Mankind, in the Provision which he has made, for their coming universally to the Knowledge and Practice of Religion, and the Enjoyment of that Happiness which it is capable of afford-

SERM. ing them. There is indeed no part of the

I. Conduct of God with respect to Men, which is not full of the Effects of his Goodness and Beneficence; these appear very remarkably in the whole Constitution of our Nature, and in the various Dispensations of Providence towards us, even in those relating to our Bodies and external Condition in this World: But the most valuable Gifts of God to Men are those which he has bestowed upon their Souls, the excellent Powers with which he has endowed them, which can lead them to an easy and quick Acquaintance with their Duty; the Seeds and Dispositions of Virtue which he has infused into their Hearts, which by a proper care and cultivation will grow up into confirmed Habits of all Goodness, and plentifully yield them the Fruits of Joy and Peace, and which are always strong enough to produce some good Effects, when most neglected and suppressed. These are clear Indications of the fatherly Tenderness and Love of God to Mankind his Children and Off-spring, and must effectually free him from the injurious Imputation, which the Doctrine advanced by some Persons seems to fix upon him, as if he had devoted the far greater Part of Men to unavoidable Destruction, and had therefore shut them up in a State of invincible Ignorance and Corruption,

Corruption, from which they cannot recover SERM.
themselves, nor yet do any thing in it, that I.

is pleasing to him, or proper for gaining his Favour. This Notion is not only false, but impious, and highly derogatory from the Glory of the great Creator, *who is good to all, and whose tender Mercies are over all his Works,* Psal. cxlv. 9.

and who must be supposed to be more especially concerned for bringing the rational and moral part of his Creation to that degree of Perfection and Happiness, for which by the frame of their Beings he has fitted and designed them; who may be justly accounted, according to the Character which St. Paul gives of him, *the Saviour of all Men*, even of those 1 Tim. iv. to whom he has not thought fit to vouchsafe 10. any extraordinary Revelations, as he has poured so much Light into their Minds, and afforded them so many advantages and helps for the practice of Virtue, as would be abundantly sufficient, if well improved, for bringing them to the end of Religion, which have actually enabled some of them to make a great Progress in Goodness, and which always influence a great part of them to many worthy and good Actions, for which they will be proportionably favoured and rewarded by him.

2. From what has been discoursed, we may see the necessary and indispensable Obligation
of

SERM. of the Laws of natural Religion and Morality.

I. These have a deep and immoveable Foundation in the nature of Man: Both the higher and lower Principles in our Minds; our leading Faculties of Conscience and Reason, and our Propensions and Affections likewise direct and determine us to obey them; and the Order of our Nature must be reversed, or the Frame of it must be destroyed, before these Laws can cease to be in force. The Authority of them does not depend upon our own Will, nor upon any human Constitutions, nor even upon the Declarations and Appointments of the Supreme Legillator himself. For though these are the most powerful and effectual Enforcements of the natural Law, yet, they do not properly constitute, or give being to it; this Law subsists and has an authority of its own, independently of the Divine Sanctions which confirm it, and would oblige Men to the several Duties which it required from them, though there was no Power in the Universe to annex positive Rewards or Punishments to the Observance or Violation of it. So that the greatest degree of *Scepticism*, and even absolute *Atheism*, if such a thing be possible, is not sufficient to release Men from all moral Obligations, and to make their Minds entirely easy in the neglect and violation of them:

them: For after they have broke thro' the SERM.
ties which the Belief of a Deity lays upon I.
them, there will still remain a Law in their ~
own Minds, that will exact from them the
performance of at least the social and relative
Duties of Life, and which will have force
enough, even when left destitute of the aids
of Religion, to inflict a severe punishment for
the omission of them. And if the obligations
of Morality would subsist, notwithstanding
such a monstrous Corruption; much more
will they subsist, after the shallow Pretences
of some Hypocrites and Enthusiasts, who have
alleged that the Law of Nature has been
dissolved by the Revelation of the Gospel,
that the Grace of God by *Jesus Christ* has
abounded so much towards Men, as to dis-
charge them from all Covenants and Bonds,
and to leave them at liberty to live just as
they please: Besides that the direct contrary
of this must be most evident to every one
that reads the Gospel with any seriousness and
attention, the thing itself is not possible, nor
consistent with the Perfections of God; and
if we could suppose that Almighty God
had declared to mankind, tho' in contradic-
tion to his own nature, that they were relea-
sed from all their natural Obligations, yet,
while they retained their present Faculties and
Dispositions,

SERM. Dispositions, they would find in fact that the

I. contrary was true; that they were still naturally subject to a Law, the Authority of which they would be forced to acknowledge, which clearly prescribed their Duty to them, and bound it upon them by certain and heavy Penalties. The Law of Nature therefore is inviolable and irreverfible, not to be abolifhed or altered, fo long as human Nature remains unaltered, by any power in Heaven or in Earth to which an invariable Obedience is due from Mankind.

3. From what has been faid, we may judge what is the true Ufe or End of Revelation. This is a point which feems to have been fometimes miftaken by fome Friends to the caufe of revealed Religion, who in their great Zeal for raifing the credit of the Chriftian Revelation, have not been contented with representing it as a more certain and effectual means of improving Men in Religion, and advancing their true Perfection and Happinefs, than their mere natural Talents and Advantages are; but have contended for it as a thing that was abfolutely wanted for giving them any juft notions of Religion, for fettling the rule of Life, and pointing out the obligations of Morality to them, and for engaging them to the practice of the feveral moral Duties and Virtues. If this

Account

Account of the matter were true, I am afraid SERM.
that instead of doing service to the cause of I.
Christianity, it must issue in the total Sub-
version of it, as it would leave it no rational
Foundation whereon to stand, as it would
take away those previous Notions and Prin-
ciples, which are necessary to the satisfying
ourselves of the Truth and Divine Original
of any Revelation. This, however, is far
from being a just State of the case: It is
plain that Men are formed with powers and
capacities, both of searching out and perform-
ing their Duty, that by means of a connate
Light, antecedently to the notices of Revela-
tion, they can discover all the main principles
and obligations of Religion, and that they
have many inducements to obey the Laws of
it in their natural Instincts and Affections, and
that these always preserve some degree both
of the knowledge and practice of Religion
among them. So that it is carrying the mat-
ter too far, to say that Revelation is so neces-
sary that without it Religion cannot at all sub-
sist, that Mankind cannot, or do not in any
sort know and worship God, and perform the
Duties which they owe to one another. The
Design of Revelation is not to lay the first
foundations of Religion, nor yet to raise the
principal parts of the Superstructure; but to
remove

SERM.

I.

remove the rubbish which the negligence and disorders of Men are apt to bring upon them, to give an additional Strength and Security to the whole Fabrick, and to carry it on to perfection, so as to render it of the greatest use and benefit to Mankind. Accordingly the Revelation of the Gospel has contributed greatly to the support and improvement of Religion, and has given it vastly more Force and Influence than it generally had before over Men; as it has set the great Truths and Principles of it in such a clear and strong Light, that they must easily dispel that Ignorance and Superstition which proceed from Men's Neglect and Abuse of their reasonable Powers, and make a lively Impression on the Minds of all who receive it; as it awakens the Attention of Men to those Duties which their Consciences naturally approve and recommend, by enjoining them in the Name and by the Authority of God, sufficiently declared by the Signs and Miracles that were wrought for the Confirmation of the Gospel; as it has proposed some new and strong Motives to the practice of Virtue, from the infinite Love of God, in the Incarnation of his Son, and the sending of his Spirit to be our Guide and Conductor in the Paths of Goodness; and as it has strengthened and improved the natural Obligations to Pie-

ty

ty and Holiness, particularly by giving us the fullest Assurance of a future State, the steady Belief of which is of the greatest consequence in many Circumstances of Life, and sufficient to make a Man adhere to Virtue in the worst Condition, to which it can be exposed in this World. These are the chief Improvements which Religion has received from Revelation, and they are certainly very considerable and important, and have rendered it a great deal more effectual in making Mankind universally and uniformly virtuous, than without them it would have been: And therefore, as the Perfection of natural Religion, so far as its containing every thing that is necessary for acquainting Men with their Duty, and enabling them to do it, is to be acknowledged and asserted, so likewise is the Usefulness of Christianity, as a more sure and powerful Means of improving Men in Knowledge and Virtue, than any of the mere Advantages of Nature are: And none who wisely consider things, will ever conclude from the acknowledged Perfection of the natural Law, and the Sufficiency of the human Faculties, when well employed, for making Mankind wise and good, that the Christian Institution is vain and superfluous; since through the Frailty and Impotency of their Nature, Men are very apt to abuse

SERM. abuse their natural Powers, and to fall into

I. both great Ignorance and Corruption, and in
 Consequence of that, to stand in need of much
 Instruction, and many Awakenings and Assist-
 ances to recover them to a just and steady sense
 and care of their Duty; which things Christian-
 ity is much better calculated to afford them,
 than any Scheme of Philosophy, and than any
 other Institution whatsoever; so that it may
 be justly accounted the Effect of the tender
 Mercy and Love of God to Mankind, and
 one of the greatest Blessings that could have
 been bestowed upon them.

4. Lastly, we may observe how much we
 Christians are concerned to live in the strictest
 Exercise of all Virtue. This is what we are
 obliged and prompted to by the ties and in-
 stincts of Nature, which are common to all
 Mankind, and which we are likewise excited
 to by the additional Force and Influence of
 Christianity: And if after all we neglect our
 Duty, and indulge ourselves in Wickedness,
 we are the most unworthy and inexcusable
 of all Men. We may be justly said, in the
 words of St. Paul, *to deny the Faith, and to
 be worse than Infidels*, to act in direct opposi-
 tion to the whole Design of the Christian Re-
 ligion, which is in effect to renounce it; and
 not only so, but to contradict the clearest Prin-
 ciples

1 Tim. v.
8.

ciples of the Light and Law of Nature, which SERM.
prevail among the unbelieving Gentiles, and I.

engage many of them to an observance of the Duties of natural Piety, Honesty, and Humanity. It may indeed be naturally expected of those who make Profession of the Gospel, that they should go beyond the rest of the World in the Innocence and Purity of their Behaviour, in proportion to the superior Advantages which they have for leading holy and virtuous Lives; that they should be, according to the Character which our Saviour gives of his Disciples, *the Light of the World, and the Salt of the Earth*; Persons who by an unblameable and exemplary Conversation instruct, purify and reform Mankind. But when, instead of this, they live just as carelessly as other Men; when they do not distinguish themselves from the Professors of the most false and corrupt Religions, unless by exceeding them in Impiety and Vice; when they fall into Crimes, as they too often do, which are shocking to human Nature, and which all the wise and honest Heathens would abhor, this is surely a dreadful Case, full both of the greatest Guilt and Danger. If our Saviour had not come into the World, we should have had no Sin in comparison of what we have, when we con-

SERMON. *tinue impenitent and wicked, after the Light*

I. *of his Gospel has shined among us, and we have enjoyed the peculiar Privileges of his*

John iii. 19. *Religion : Now we can have no Cloak for our Sins, and this will be our Condemnation, that Light has come into the World, but we have loved Darkness rather than Light, because our Deeds are evil.*

SERMON

SERMON II.

The true Excellency of Men.

PROV. XII. 26.

The Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour.

IT must be evident to all who have made any just Reflections on Human Nature, and what passes within themselves, that Perceptions of Beauty, Worth, and Excellence, necessarily arise in us upon the view of certain Qualities, Characters, and Actions; and that they have a very great Influence upon us, both in the Management of ourselves, and our Behaviour towards others. The Power or Faculty by which we receive these Perceptions would probably exert itself very uniformly in all Persons, and lead them to the same Conclusions, if they were all equally unprejudiced, and careful to examine the Na-

SERM. ture and Consequences of things, before they

II. formed their Opinion of the goodness and worth of Men and their Actions. But some, through a long continuance in a course of Vice, being very much prejudiced in it's favour, are apt to glory in some things as Ornaments and Excellencies, which all impartial Persons can easily see to be very shameful and reproachful to them: And others being very inattentive and negligent, and averse to all Inquiries which would put them to any pains, are easily blinded with false Appearances, are ready to go into any prevailing Opinions, and to esteem some Qualities which perhaps are but trifling in themselves, because they make a dazzling show, or happen to be accounted fashionable and genteel, the most worthy and honourable Accomplishments that they can be possessed of, while those things which are the true Dignity and Perfection of their Nature are too much overlooked and despised by them. This may make it necessary to consider wherein the real *Merit* and *Excellence* of Men consist, what the Qualities are which constitute a good and generous Character, and principally claim our Esteem and Approbation. If we can fix a just Notion of this matter in our Minds, it may certainly be of the greatest use, for the good Conduct of our Lives,

Lives, and for securing to us the highest and noblest pleasures of which we are capable. SERM. II.

Solomon has determined in the Text, where-
in the truest Excellence of Men consists; *the Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour*, that is, than any other Person; so that, according to him, *Righteousness* is our chief Perfection, that which argues more worth in us, and gives a greater Beauty to our Characters, than all the other Accomplishments and Advantages that we may be possessed of, can do.

Now this is a very just Determination, and for making it appear to be so, I shall, first, consider what is comprehended in *Righteousness*, and then shew that the things included in it, are the most amiable and excellent Qualities that can belong to us, and which most of all adorn and perfect our Nature.

For the first Particular: *Righteousness* here is to be taken in the most extensive sense, as signifying Religion and Virtue in general; and so it comprehends the Exercise of all the good Dispositions, and a Performance of all the Duties which are required from us, either by the Laws of Nature, or that Revelation which God has given us in his Word, as Reverence, Love, Gratitude, Dependance, Submission, and Resignation towards God; Justice, Equity, Truth, Compassion, Meekness,

SERM. and Charity with respect to Men; Sobriety and

II. Moderation in the use of sensitive pleasures, a strict command of our Appetites and Passions, so as never to do any thing for the gratification of them which would be injurious either to our Minds or Bodies, or which would be a Violation of any of the Rules of Piety, Justice and Humanity. These and all other religious and moral Duties are included in the notion of Righteousness, and must be practised by us before we can be denominated Righteous Persons. And we must not think it enough to practise these Duties only on some Occasions, and to have several good Affections in our Minds, while any Passions remain in us, which in any plain Instances draw us into vice; but we must be uniform and constant in our Obedience to the Laws of God, and always endeavouring to render ourselves more perfect in all Goodness. Nothing less will be sufficient to procure us the Character of religious and virtuous Persons. A partial and incomplete performance of our Duty is far from recommending us to God; on the contrary, a wilful Defect in any part of it destroys our religious Character in his Estimation, involves us in an universal Guilt, and a violation of the whole Law; according to that Declaration of St. James, *Whosoever shall keep*

James ii.
10.

the

The true Excellency of Men.

39

SERM.

II.



the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all. And tho' we have set out well, and have made some progress in Virtue, yet if we afterwards become negligent and remiss in it, and fall into the Practice of wickedness, all our former Goodness will profit us nothing. *The Righteousness of the Righteous shall not deliver him in the Day of his Transgression, neither shall he be able to live in the Day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the Righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own Righteousness, and commit Iniquity, all his Righteousness shall not be remembered, but for his Iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. It had been better for not to have known the way of Righteousness, than after we have known it, to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto us. We must therefore have an universal respect to the Commandments of God, and continue steadfast and unmoveable in his Service, and always abound in it. Indeed it is not to be expected that we shall be altogether free from Defects, while we continue in this present state of Frailty and Temptation; there is some mixture of Weakness and Folly in the Characters even of the best of Men: But no evil Inclinations must ever be indulged by us; the prevailing and habitual bent of our Minds must*

Ezek.
xxxiii.
12, 13.

2 Pet. ii.
21.

SERM. be to all Holiness; we must be daily striving
 II. against the Infirmities which we find in our-
 selves, and use all proper Methods to get rid
 of them, and to arrive at as high a degree of
 Purity and Virtue, as the Condition and Cir-
 cumstances of our Nature will allow us to do.
 So much is necessary in order to our being ac-
 counted truly religious, and our acting up to
 those measures of Righteousness and Obedience,
 which are laid down to us in the Gospel.

Having given this account of what is com-
 prehended in *Righteousness*, I shall proceed to
 shew, that the things included in it, are the
 most amiable Qualities that can belong to us,
 and the greatest Accomplishments and Per-
 fections of our Nature.

Now of the truth of this we may be assur-
 ed, by attending carefully to the state of our
 Minds, and the Sentiments and Affections
 which we feel, upon viewing our own Tem-
 pers, and the Dispositions and Characters of
 others. It is plain, that we are made with a
 Power of surveying our own Nature, of re-
 flecting upon our Hearts, and the several Prin-
 ciples, Passions, and Affections which have
 any place in them: We can likewise look in-
 to the Tempers of others, at least we can form
 a probable Judgment of them, from the
 Knowledge which we have of our own, and
 our

our Observations on their outward actions and S E R M.
Behaviour. And in taking a view of the II,

frame of our own Minds, and those of others, we always find something that is beautiful and agreeable, and that gains our Esteem and Love, or something which is disagreeable, and which raises our Aversion, according as certain Qualities and Dispositions prevail in them, or the contrary: Just as in surveying the external Forms and Representations of things, we have Ideas of Beauty or Deformity excited in us, according as the several parts of them are regularly arranged and proportioned, or otherwise. This is so certain and manifest, that it is hardly in the power of the Men most prejudiced against this Notion, to deny it. Now the Qualities and Affections which appear thus amiable to us, and command our Esteem and Approbation, are those which have been mentioned, as included in the Character of a religious and righteous Person; such as Reverence, Love, Gratitude, and Resignation to the Deity; Justice, Fidelity, Mercy, and Benevolence towards Mankind; Temperance, or a steady Government of all our private Appetites and Passions. Each of these Qualities, considered separately, has a lovely Appearance, and when all of them meet together in any Person, who has raised and improved them in himself

SERMON. himself to a high degree; they form the most
 II. truly worthy and excellent Character, of which
 among Men we have any Conception. Let
 any one represent to his own Mind, a Person
 possessed of all these Qualities and Dispositions;
 a Man, whose Heart is full of all devout and
 pious Affections to the Supreme Being, who
 has the greatest Veneration of his Excellencies,
 a strong Love and Gratitude to him for his
 Mercies, and who from a lively sense of his
 Goodness, and of the Wisdom and Equity of
 all his Laws and all his Determinations, is en-
 tirely obedient and submissive to him; a Man
 who is steadily and impartially just, compassi-
 onate, friendly, and kind in all his Dealings
 in the World; who studies and endeavours to
 promote the universal Happiness of his Fellow-
 Creatures, so far as it is in his power to do it;
 a Man, who indulges no Desires in himself to
 the detriment of others, but who gratifies all
 his Appetites and Inclinations within the Bounds
 of Sobriety and Modesty, and so as to keep
 himself always in the fittest Temper for dis-
 charging the Duties which he owes to God,
 and to Man. Let any one, I say, represent
 this Character to himself, and let him atten-
 tively view and consider it, and he will im-
 mediately perceive a Veneration of it arising
 in his Heart, that he cannot but admire and
 love

love it, and account it the chief Glory and Perfection of Men to attain to it,

I know indeed that some, who by false Principles and evil Habits, have lost much of their natural Relish of Virtue, will not be so strongly affected with the Beauties of this Character, as those who have not corrupted themselves are ; but if any should pretend that he is altogether indifferent towards it, and sees nothing of Excellence in it to recommend it to him, more than in the contrary, he might justly be suspected of Affectation or Insincerity. A sense of moral Beauty and Excellence in those Dispositions and Actions, which are expressive of our Respect, Love and Gratitude to the Deity, and of our Justice, Good-will, and Friendship to Mankind, is too deeply imprinted on the human Nature to be ever wholly removed or suppressed : Those who are most willing to appear void of it, do yet, in spite of themselves, discover in many Instances that they have it ; especially with relation to the Conduct of others, which is almost always admired and praised by them, or disapproved and condemned, according as it proceeds from Principles of Piety, Justice, and Humanity, or the contrary. And even with respect to their own Behaviour, they appear to be in some measure under its Influence ;
there

SERM. there being hardly any of them who will proceed to the Extremities of Wickedness, when they can obtain their Ends by lower degrees of it, or who would not chuse to accomplish their Designs by the Methods of Honesty and Generosity, rather than of Injustice and Cruelty, if the fair and generous Methods were as effectual for their Purposes as the other. A plain Evidence that they feel something more of the Reality and Excellence of Virtue than they are willing to own, that this is more agreeable to their Nature, and more approved by their Consciences, tho' through the Violence of ungoverned Desires they are often forced to depart from it, than the contrary.

There are others again, who through Carelessness and want of Attention, and a vain confused Imagination, do not very readily discern the real worth and value of those Qualities which make up the Character of a righteous Man, but are apt to have a greater esteem of some Advantages and Abilities which Men may be possessed of, without any share of Virtue or Righteousness; such as *Birth, Stations, Titles, Power, Fortune, a beautiful Person, fashionable Dress and Behaviour, Wisdom, Wit, Knowledge, Learning, Courage,* and the like: These things have a glaring

Appear.

Appearance, and by the common vogue of the World are set at a high Price; and so they hardly fail to fill the Imaginations of unthinking Men, and to draw them into an Opinion of the extraordinary Excellence and Dignity of those who possess them, and to make them overlook or despise all others, in comparison of the Persons whom they so much admire. But as it is only the want of Thought and Consideration which makes them judge thus, a little Reflection and Attention will be sufficient to correct their Mistakes. There is certainly none so stupid, as upon considering seriously these two Characters; the one including true Piety, thorough Honesty and Integrity, fervent extensive Charity, and unaffected Modesty and Sobriety, without any more external Advantages and natural Abilities than are necessary for a Man's acting a virtuous part; and the other comprehending as great degrees of all these Advantages and Abilities as can be conceived, but without being made any way subservient to the Purposes of Piety and Virtue; there is none, I say, so stupid, as upon comparing attentively these Characters, not to give the preference to the former. Let those who are most disposed to pay respect to *Quality, Power, Riches, Knowledge, Penetration, Resolution*, and the like, make this Com-

SERM. Comparison fairly and deliberately, and they
 II. will soon find some Charms in Virtue, far
 superior to any that they can find in those
 Advantages; that the Contemplation of a *pious, upright, humane, friendly, and generous*
 Temper, raises a higher Approbation in them,
 and affects them with a nobler Joy than the
 contemplation of any other Qualities or Advantages
 belonging to Men can do. Indeed the principal value of those Advantages which
 Men are possessed of from their outward Condition and Circumstances in the World, and
 the natural Powers and adventitious Ornaments of their Minds and Bodies, is derived
 from their Subserviency to the ends of Piety, Humanity, and Benevolence. An eminent
 Station in Life, Power, Wealth, Knowledge, Sagacity, and Fortitude, are the means
 of undertaking and executing the most heroic and generous Designs; the Persons who possess
 them, have it in their power to contribute most effectually to the Honour of God, and
 the Happiness of the World, and for this reason they may be justly desired and valued by a
 wise and good Man. But if these Advantages and Abilities be applied, not to the carrying
 on any pious, benevolent, and publickly useful Ends, but rather to the contrary; they
 are so far from recommending their Possessors

to our Esteem, that they always make us de-
spise and hate them. Who can have the least
Veneration for a Man raised to the top of all
worldly Grandeur, who does not improve
the Advantages which the Eminence of his
Condition gives him for promoting the Glory
of his Creator, and for lessening the Miseries,
and increasing the Prosperity and Welfare of
his Fellow-Creatures; but who only uses them
for indulging in a solitary Luxury, and secu-
ring to himself a Liberty of committing all
Injustice, Oppression and Cruelty with im-
punity? It is impossible, if we reflect at all,
that all the external Splendor of such a Man,
can ever beget an Approbation of him in our
Minds, or even hide his Deformity from our
Eyes, or that we can have any Sentiments and
Dispositions towards him, but those of Dread,
Aversion, and Abhorrence. Who will respect
Persons for their Wisdom, Learning, Wit,
Beauty, Strength, and Courage, when they
are only wise for themselves, or skilful to do
mischief? When their Learning is spent about
vain Amusements, and in making discoveries
of no importance to the world? When their
Wit is employed to give pain to their Compa-
ny, or to abuse the Simplicity and Weakness
of plain honest Men, or to bring things truly
venerable and sacred into contempt? When
their

SERM. their Beauty and Strength are the Occasion of

II. Pride, Insolence and Disdain of others in them? And when their courage only enabled them to undertake and accomplish any pernicious Projects, which their own Wantonness, Lust, Avarice, or Ambition may prompt them to? The Possession of these Advantages and Powers, while they are thus applied, will procure no Esteem to Men, from Persons of the least Consideration, but will give such a mean Opinion of them, and excite their Indignation against them. Where such Abilities meet with a sincerely honest and well-disposed Mind, and are made use of to promote the Designs which it must have in view, they will certainly raise and adorn a Man's Character, and make it shine with a peculiar Lustre: And it is probably upon some presumption of a good Intention in the Application of them, that many are disposed to pay so much Honour to them as they do; for whenever they appear to be used with no pious, upright, or benevolent Intentions, which, upon a little Reflection, we often see is the Case, they immediately sink in our Esteem, and we return, according to the original sense of our Minds, to value Men only in proportion to their Piety, Integrity, and Humanity, which are things that stand in need of nothing to commend



commend them to us, but have an immediate Goodness, and are lovely in themselves, and which, when strongly displayed in the Character of any Man, force us to honour him greatly, and to conclude that he is possessed of the most glorious Ornaments and Excellencies of the human Nature.

It is thus that our Nature plainly determines us to judge of the true Worth and Excellence of Mankind; and it is thus, we find, that wise Men have always thought, and do think concerning these things. What was it that recommended the great Men among the Ancients to the Esteem and Love of their Contemporaries and Fellow-Citizens, and which has transmitted their Names with so much Applause and Honour to Posterity? Not their Power, Riches, Wisdom, nor any other Talents and Advantages considered in themselves, but the moral Qualities of their Minds, which determined them to make the proper Use of their several Talents and Advantages; their pious Dispositions towards the Divinity, their Justice, Friendship, and Benevolence, their publick Spirit and Zeal in promoting the Interest of their Country, their Moderation and Contempt of such Pleasures as would have weakened their own Minds, or have tended to the Prejudice of others. These

SERM. were the things which made them the Fa-

II.  yourites of all confiderate Persons, in the times in which they lived, and have secured them an immortal Glory in all the succeeding Ages of the World. What are the things that are observed to engage the Esteem and Friendship of Men to fictitious Characters? Nothing but Honesty, Truth, Gratitude, Kindness, Generosity, and the like; the most advantageous Circumstances of Fortune without these, are never regarded by a Man of Reflection; but if these Qualities are represented to advantage in any Character, none who attend to it can withhold their Love and Approbation. And how do Men govern themselves, when sometimes for their Amusement they form imaginary Schemes for making themselves great and considerable in the World? Do they not always in these Entertainments of the Mind strictly observe the Maxims of Truth, Equity, Gratitude, Friendship, and Liberality, as the Means of arriving at their imagined Greatness, and never once think of rendering themselves remarkable in any other way? A fair Presumption, that in the most free and unprejudiced Judgment of their Minds, they are satisfied that these Virtues are their truest Honour, and

The true Excellency of Men.

31

and the highest Dignity and Advancement of S E R M.
their Nature. II.

And it is thus indeed, that God himself, whose Judgment is always according to Truth, judges of the Excellence of Men, and has directed us to judge of it also. Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise Man glory in his Wisdom, neither let the mighty Man glory in his Might, let not the rich Man glory in his Riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, who exercise Loving-kindness, Judgment, and Righteousness in the Earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good, what is morally good, what is amiable and excellent, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. He has represented his moral Attributes as the great Beauties and Excellencies of his own Nature: Thus, when he made a Discovery of his Glory to Moses, it was by making his goodness to pass before him, and proclaiming himself the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, and Transgression and Sin, and that will by no means clear the Guilty: And our Saviour

E 2

teaches

SERMON. teaches us, that we are possessed of the great-

II. est Excellence, when we bear a resemblance of

God in those amiable Attributes; that we shew ourselves to be his true *Children*, and are

Matth. v. *perfect even as he is perfect*, by being kind and
45. 48. beneficent to all Men, in imitation of his

diffusive and unlimited Goodness. St. Paul

1 Cor. xiii. likewise speaks of *Charity*, which, in its large
1, 2, 3. Sense, comprehends all morally good Quali-

ties, as the highest Perfection of Mankind, nay, as the only thing which can give any real Worth to them, without which the greatest degrees of *Faith* and *Knowledge*, the most *miraculous* Gifts and Endowments, and the most splendid outward Performances will signify nothing. And in general, wherever the *Scripture* takes notice of those things which are the true Excellencies and Ornaments of Men, it always instances in some morally good Qualities and dispositions, as *Sincerity*, *Justice*, *Meekness*, and *Modesty*: These are the things which the *sacred* Writers represent to us as most truly lovely, and of good Report, which give a solid worth and value to those who possess them, and will not fail to procure them the Acceptance and Favour of God, and the Approbation and Love of the wiser and better part of Mankind.

Thus, I hope, it is sufficiently plain, that

Solomon

Solomon has justly asserted, that the *Righteous* is the most *excellent* of all Men; that the good Qualities which he is possessed of make his Character more *lovely* and *honourable*, than the Character of any other Person can be. It must however be observed, that the having some of these Qualities, while we are defective in others, and while those which we have, are overballanced by evil Dispositions, is not enough to render our Characters upon the whole amiable or excellent, or to intitle us to any large Share of the Approbation of Men. Every good Disposition indeed, every Instance of Piety, Justice, Gratitude, Friendship, and Benevolence, has some Degree of Beauty in it, is approved by our Consciences, and lessens the Odiousness and Deformity of evil Characters; but when these good Dispositions are only accidentally exerted, and do not habitually prevail in the Mind; when in the Struggles which happen between them and vicious Affections, they are always or for the most part overcome, they cannot make us much admire the Man who has them, or account him, upon considering his entire Character, a Person of Worth and Excellence. As a Man is reputed *Religious*, not for performing only some parts of his Duty, but for rendering a sincere, universal, and steady Obe-

SERM. dience to the Laws of God; so likewise is he

II. to be accounted *morally Excellent*, not for having only some amiable Affections, and exercising them only on some Occasions, but for possessing all the amiable Affections that he can raise in himself, and acting habitually and uniformly under the Influence of them. And when a Man is possessed of all the morally good Qualities and Dispositions that he can have, and is always cherishing, strengthening, and improving them, and makes them the actuating Principles of his Life; he then indeed appears in the most advantageous Light; we cannot but highly reverence him, and esteem his Character as perfect as it can be made in this world.

I shall now make some useful Observations and Reflections upon this Subject.

I. We may observe the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in adapting his Laws to our Nature, or in requiring those things from us as the instances of our Duty, which by their own intrinsic Worth and Excellence approve and recommend themselves to our Consciences. This Conduct is every way worthy of the all-wise and merciful Creator and Father of Mankind, and an Argument that he sincerely designs our Happiness. If he took any pleasure in vexing and tormenting

menting us, it would have been an easy matter S E R M.
to him to have required from us, under II.
some severe Penalties, the Performance of such
things, as would have been entirely disagree-
able to our Nature, and which we could not
have thought of but with Contempt and
Aversion: But this he has not done. How-
ever the Religions invented by Men, have of-
ten imposed such Practices on their Professors,
as a wise and good Man cannot but despise or
abhor; the true Religion, of which God is
the Author, is clear of this Imputation. The
principal things prescribed by it, shine with
their own native Charms, and must, so long
as we continue the Creatures that we are, be
held in perpetual Veneration by us: Though
they had never been enjoined by the Autho-
rity of a Legislator, with power to reward
or punish us, according to our Obedience or
Disobedience; yet in pursuance of the Dic-
tates of our own Minds, and from our in-
ward Sense and Perception of the Amiability
and Goodness of them, we could not but have
esteemed and loved them. This is manifestly
true with respect to the Duties of Reverence,
Gratitude, Love, and Submission to God; Ju-
stice, Faithfulness, Compassion, and Kind-
ness towards Mankind; and Sobriety or Mo-
deration in the Government of ourselves;

SERM. which always have been, and will be the

II. Substance of all true Religion. And if beside these Duties, there are some things, in their own nature, and antecedently to their being positively commanded, indifferent, required even under the last and most perfect Dispensation of Religion contained in the Gospel, yet these positive Duties are so few and simple, so remote from every thing that can be called Superstition, and have such a plain Tendency to keep up in our Minds a lively Sense of the Obligations we are under to practise all Virtue, and to fix our Attention on those Objects which are most proper to inspire us with generous Sentiments and Affections, that it may well be thought, that a fair and ingenuous Man will never complain of them, but will rather acknowledge them to be prudent and gracious Condescensions to the Infirmities of Men, and think himself very much obliged to God for appointing them.

2. It may be here remarked for the comfort of Persons in the meanest condition of Life, that even they are capable of partaking of the most real Merit and Excellence. For the Excellency of Men consisting in morally good Qualities and Dispositions of Mind, which are in every one's power, it is plain that no external

Circumstances

Circumstances can hinder any from possessing SERM.
it. Those indeed who labour under Poverty II.
and other outward Disadvantages, will not be
able to make their Merit so universally conspicuous, and to attract the Admiration and Love of so great numbers, as others in a more prosperous Condition may do: But if they be careful to cultivate and improve all pious, upright, and friendly Affections in their Hearts, and to do all the good which their Station in the World will admit of, by setting an Example of Contentment, Patience, and chearful Submission to the Appointments of Providence; by providing for their Families in the way of Honesty and Industry, by giving prudent and faithful Counsels and Reproofs, and by relieving and assisting the distressed so far as their small Ability will go; they must appear as truly amiable, in the Judgment of God, and all Persons of a true Discernment, in their low Sphere, as those who are exalted to the most eminent Stations in Life, who, tho' they may do more for the Honour of God and the Happiness of Mankind, than the Persons in a depressed Condition can do, yet perhaps do not exceed them in those noble Dispositions of Soul, from whence their Acts of Piety, Humanity, and Beneficence proceed. Now this may be matter of the most
delightful

SERM. delightful Reflection to many Men of honest

II. and generous Hearts, who are sometimes apt to grow uneasy, and to be discouraged under the neglect and contempt of the inconsiderate part of the World: To think, that notwithstanding the Lowness of their Condition, and the mean Figure they make in the eyes of thoughtless and undistinguishing Men, they are possessed of those Qualities, which are the truest Honour and Dignity of the human Nature, and which must intitle them to the Esteem and Favour of their Creator and all the most valuable part of their own Species, may certainly administer the most sincere Consolation and Joy to them, and make them nobly bear up under all the Difficulties of an obscure or adverse Fortune, which without such a Support would perhaps be enough to oppress them.

3. We may learn from what has been discoursed, to distinguish between Men, and to express our Esteem and Friendship for every one as he deserves. It is a great Evil, which has been long complained of by Persons of generous Minds, that Men of the greatest Worth are very much disregarded in the World, while others are honoured, courted and applauded, only because they happen to be raised above them by their Descent, Riches,

riches, Power, Titles, Wit, and such likethings, SERM.

which tho' they make a glittering Show, yet are no tokens of real Merit, nor lay a just

Foundation for Honour and Regard at all.

This way of distributing our Esteem and Favour is very unjust to the Virtuous, as it deprives them of part of that Reward which

they may fairly claim and expect, and has a

tendency to create in unwary Minds Suspi-

cions of the Excellence of Virtue, and to

make them grow weary of the Practice of it;

besides that it has a most unhappy Influence

upon ourselves, as it spoils our Taste for Inte-

grity, Truth, Justice, Goodness, and other

lovely and excellent Qualities, and fixes our

Admiration on things that have no true worth

to recommend them, which will not fail to

take us very much off from all noble and man-

ly Pursuits, and to make way for great mean-

ness and corruption of Mind. We should

take care therefore, to value Men accord-

ing to their true Merit, and not suffer our-

selves to be carried away with any common

Prejudices, and wrong Appearances in the

Judgments which we form of them, and in

the Expressions of our Esteem and Good-will

to them. Those who are possessed of Piety,

Justice, Humanity, and all other morally

good Qualities, and who are always improving

them

SERMON. them in themselves, and exerting them in an
 II. uniform Course of all virtuous Actions, are
 certainly the most amiable of all Men; they
 are indeed the Glory of the human Nature,
 and may make us think well and boast of
 our Species, as they prove undeniably that by a
 prudent and careful Management of ourselves,
 we may avoid those Corruptions which are so
 common in the World, and make great Im-
 provements in whatever is worthy, good, and
 honourable. Such Persons cannot but be the
 Darlings of wise and generous Men, and have
 a right to be principally esteemed and loved by
 all Men: Indeed nothing but Ignorance or
 Inattention, or some Corruption of Heart, can
 prevent their receiving the greatest and most
 general Respect and Honour. If we judge
 truly, and act as our Consciences naturally sug-
 gest and dictate to us, we shall account them
 the most excellent Persons upon Earth, and
 take the utmost pleasure in giving them our
 Countenance and Friendship: We shall pre-
 fer them to all others on account of their supe-
 rior Merit, and regard those who come after
 them in Goodness, in proportion to the ami-
 able Qualities which they possess; while the
 Men who have nothing or but very little that
 is excellent in them, will be disregarded and
 despised by us. This is the Temper which is
 always

always formed in us from an impartial View SERM.
of the real Characters of Men, and our gi- II.
ving way to those honest and generous Pas-
sions which such a view excites. There are
indeed some external Marks of Distinction and
Respect to be given to Men in publick Stations,
and a common Complaisance and Civility to
be expressed to all with whom we have any
Intercourse, whatever their moral Characters
may be; these things are necessary for the
Order and Peace of Society, and the happy
Management of the common Affairs of Life.
And there are great Condescensions to be made
to some Persons, whose Characters may in
several respects be very disagreeable to us, so
long as we have any prospect by this means of
amending them; we must not be so severe
on the infirmities and faults of Men, as ab-
solutely to despise them, and cast off all Con-
cern for them, while they retain so much Sin-
cerity and Goodness of Temper, as to be wil-
ling to hearken to wise Counsels and Admo-
nitions; but in this case we must use them ten-
derly and gently, and take all the prudent
Methods that we can for delivering them from
their Follies and Vices; and bringing them to
a just sense of Religion and Virtue. This is
a very proper Expression of our Humanity to-
wards them; an Instance of our Concern
for

SER M. for the Honour of God and of Religion; and

II.  what the Example of our Saviour, who conversed very freely and familiarly with Persons but of indifferent Characters for their Good, strongly recommends to us. But to go beyond the ordinary Measures of Decency and Civility in our Behaviour to Men of bad Characters, whom we can never hope to reclaim; to give special Marks of our Esteem and Favour to Persons, who are really a Disgrace to Humanity, and the justest Objects of our Indignation and Contempt, because they move in a higher Sphere than the common Rank of Men, when, perhaps, at the same time, we neglect, or at best behold with Indifference, Men of true worth in a humbler Station; to act thus, I say, discovers a most base and abject Spirit; is inconsistent with that noble Zeal for the Cause of Virtue, which should possess the Breast of every good Man; and is attended with very pernicious Consequences.

4. From what has been said, there arises a strong Motive and Encouragement to the practice of Virtue. For must it not exceedingly recommend it to us, to consider that it is our great Glory and Excellency, the thing which exalts and dignifies our Nature, and renders us most truly amiable and honourable in the Opinion

pinion of all wise and disinterested Observers? **SERM.**
Certainly, tho' we had no Prospect of such ad- **II.**

vantageous Consequences from Virtue, as really flow from it, yet if we had any greatness and generosity of Mind in us, if we had any Reverence for ourselves and the dignity of our Beings, if we retained a sense of what is decent and becoming us, we would always love and practise it. This is not to be called an enthusiastick Rant; I doubt not but that every honest Mind, that is at pains to reflect upon itself, may have a very lively Perception of the truth of it. But the natural Excellence of Virtue is not the only thing which recommends it to us; for besides this, it is the means of affording us the truest Pleasure from the Approbation of our own Hearts, and the Esteem and Love of others. This, which is the most valuable instance of Happiness, and the greatest Comfort that a Man can have under any Misfortunes that he may meet with in Life, will surely be obtained by a course of sincere Piety and Goodness. If we be really possessed of pious, upright, and benevolent Dispositions, and live under the Influence of them, we cannot but perceive it; and the Consciousness of this must be most delightful: We shall reflect upon our own Worth with a peculiar Satisfaction, and receive a Joy from it,
which

SERM. which will most intimately affect us, and

II. which no external Accidents can ever deprive us of, but will, so long as we preserve a virtuous Temper, constantly abide with us. This Joy will be increased by the Applause and Friendship of wise and good Men; these, whose Judgment alone in this world is to be valued, will always approve and praise our Conduct, and be ready, as they have Opportunity, to contribute to our Ease and Contentment. And our Happiness will be rendered most compleat from our hope of the Approbation of that great Being, who is incomparably the best Judge of the true merit of Men, and on whom we entirely depend for our Existence and all our Enjoyments. From all the Notions which we can rationally have of the

Psalm xi. *Deity*, we must conclude, that *He loveth Righteousness, and with pleasure beholdeth the Upright*; and that the time is coming, when he will make a full Discovery of his Sentiments of Men, and when, if we be sincerely virtuous, we shall have the most vigorous sense of his Approbation, and receive the highest marks of Honour and Favour from him: when *we shall shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of our Father*, and appear, even to those who may now despise and reproach us, to be the most excellent and happy of all Men.

Matth.
xiii. 43.

If

If then we would obtain the noble Pleasures of **SERM.**

Self-approbation, if we would have *the Testi-*

H.

mony of our Consciences for a constant Rejoicing

to us, and if we would procure ourselves

Esteem from God and good Men; let us be

careful to practice all Virtue and Goodness.

By no other means can we secure lasting Peace

in our own Breasts, and obtain Honour from

those whose good Opinion only is to be re-

spected. It is very possible indeed, that

through habitual Thoughtlessness, and that

great Corruption which a course of Wickedness

always produces in the Heart, we may not rea-

sily discern the baseness and deformity of Vice

in many Instances, but may come to think

well of it, and to practise it under the Ap-

pearance of Innocence and Virtue; and the

persons who are as inattentive, and as much

corrupted as we are, may be ready to defend and

applaud us. But we can never be sure of being

long at ease, while we continue in this Con-

dition; for whenever we are brought to confi-

deration, which the Adversities that befall us

in the World may often bring us to, all our

Peace will vanish: We shall then see ourselves

in a true light, and not be able to bear the

Review without the bitterest Anguish and

Self-condemnation. The Applause and Com-

mendation of our Associates in Wickedness

SERM. will then be of no use, because we shall know
 II. that they are not well founded ; but the Dis-
 ~~~~~ approbation of wise and good Men, will add  
 much to our Uneasiness: And our Case will be  
 made still more deplorable by our Apprehen-  
 sions of the Judgment of God, from whom  
 we can expect nothing, except we repent and  
 reform ourselves, but that he should banish us  
 from his Presence, and expose us to that  
 Shame, Contempt, and Misery, which are the  
 natural and just Consequences of our Impiety  
 and Wickedness. It is therefore only by the  
 practice of Virtue, that we can attain to true  
 Honour and Felicity. Let it be our Business  
 then above all things, to raise and strengthen  
 all good Dispositions in ourselves: Let us al-  
 ways look on these as of the greatest impor-  
 tance, and value other things only as they give  
 us an opportunity of exerting more effectual-  
 ly our pious, benevolent, and generous Affec-  
 tions : Let those who have any extraordinary  
 Advantages from their Station and Condition  
 in the World, or from the natural or acquired  
 Abilities of their Minds or Bodies, never think  
 highly of themselves, purely because they pos-  
 sess them; for this they may do without par-  
 taking of any real Worth ; but let them pru-  
 dently apply such Advantages to the promoting  
 of the Designs of Piety and Humanity, which

will make them turn both to their Glory and SERM.  
Satisfaction : And let every one of us endea- II.  
vour to increase continually in goodness, by  
all the means we have of doing it, particular-  
ly by offering our Prayers to the God of all  
Mercy and Grace, to assist us in improving  
ourselves in Righteousness; that so we may ar-  
rive at that Excellency and Dignity, that Ho-  
nour and Happiness of Nature which he has  
made us capable of enjoying.

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F 2

SERMON



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# SERMON III.

## The Weightier Matters of Religion.

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MATTH. XXIII. 23.

*Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites;  
for ye pay Tithe of Mint, and Anise, and  
Cummin, and have omitted the weightier  
matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy and  
Faith: These ought ye to have done, and  
not to leave the other undone.*

LUKE XI. 42.

*But wo unto you Pharisees, for ye tithe Mint  
and Rue, and all manner of Herbs, and  
pass over Judgment and the Love of God:  
These ought ye to have done, and not to leave  
the other undone.*

**I**N these two Passages our Saviour censures  
the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, for their vile  
Hypocrisy, in expressing the greatest Zeal  
for the ritual Observances of their Law, while  
they

they shamefully neglected and made no account of the principal and most important Duties of it; in being superstitiously nice and scrupulous about the tithing of some inconsiderable Herbs, while they had no regard to Justice and Equity, Mercy and Charity, Faithfulness and Truth, and a Reverence and Love of God, which Duties contain the Substance of all Religion, and are by far the most amiable and necessary parts of it: Whereas, on the other hand, though those smaller matters which they were so zealous about, were not altogether to be disregarded, yet these great and important Duties ought certainly to have been the Objects of their first and chief Care: The Warmth and Indignation with which our Lord reproves the *Pharisees* for this perversion of Religion, may convince us, that it is of great consequence to understand the nature and value of the several religious Duties which we perform, and to proportion our Zeal for them, according to their real Importance.

In discoursing on this Subject, I shall proceed in the following Method,

I. I shall explain the several Virtues, which our Saviour here instances in, as the principal and most important Duties of Religion.

SER M. II. I shall shew that these Virtues are indeed the principal and most important parts of Religion, and which, above all other things in it, deserve our Pains and Care.

III.

Lastly, I shall make some useful Reflections upon the whole.

First, I shall explain the several Virtues which our Saviour here mentions as the principal and most important Duties of Religion. And this I shall do as plainly and briefly as I can. The first Virtue which our Saviour speaks of is, *Judgment or Justice*. This, as it is a Virtue to be practised by Men in a private Capacity, in which view only I shall here consider it, is a Disposition to abstain from all invasion of the Properties and Rights of others, and to render to them all the things which they can demand as their own. There are some things which all Persons obtain a Property in from the bounty of Nature, such as their Life, Health, and Liberty; and there are other things which they acquire a Right to by their own Labour and Industry, or by fair Compact, by legal Constitution, or the voluntary Donation of others, as Riches, Lands, and by far the greatest part of the Possessions which they have in the World. The Preservation of their Rights and Titles to the things which



which are thus acquired by them, is the firmest Bond of human Society, without which it would be impossible for Men with any comfort to subsist together. It is therefore necessary that all be allowed to enjoy, use, and dispose of things which are their own: And in allowing them to do so, without usurping their Property, or detaining any part of it from them, the virtue of Justice consists. Contrary to which, is the taking away the Life of any Man at pleasure, or when he has done nothing to forfeit it; the wounding or maiming of his Body; the depriving him of his Liberty; the blemishing his Reputation; the dishonouring his Bed; the robbing or stealing from him any part of his Estate; the deceiving him in matters of Commerce, and in Compacts; and the retaining his Debts beyond the time of Payment. All these practices are violations of the Properties and Rights of others, and if we would act a just and equitable part, we must carefully avoid them; or, if we be sensible that we have offended in any of these Particulars, we must, to the utmost of our power, make a Reparation of the Injuries which we have done to our Neighbours; for till we do this, their Rights are violated, and our Injustice to them is still continued by us.

The next Virtue which our Saviour here

SERM. mentions, is *Mercy*. This consists in a Dispo-

III. sition to pity, and to endeavour by all means the deliverance of those who are in misery, or are liable to it. The Foundation of it is laid in that Tenderness or Compassion which is natural to us, which we must feel whenever any Objects of Distress are presented to our view: This Compassion for the Miserable, directly leads us to relieve and assist them. And when, in pursuance of the tender and humane Propensions of our Nature, we afford such Persons all the Relief and Help in our power, we then discharge this important Duty of Mercy. The Assistance which we are to give to the Miserable, must be of different kinds, according to the nature of the Distresses in which they may happen to be: These may in different ways affect either their Minds or their Bodies, and so our Relief and Help must reach to either as there is necessity, and appear in all those Instances, whereby we may promote either the spiritual or temporal Good of our unhappy Brethren, and deliver them either from present or from future Misery. Thus, for example, the instructing the Ignorant; the reclaiming the vicious, by good Counsels and Advices, and discreet and kind Reproofs; the

Gal. vi. 1. *restoring those who have been overtaken in a*  
 1 Thess. v. *fault, in the spirit of meekness; the supporting*

the Weak; and the comforting the Feeble-mind- SERM.

III.

happy Souls, and they are indeed the most noble and momentous Expressions of it, as they deliver Men from the greatest Evils, and make them partakers of the most real and durable Happiness. Again: The visiting and comforting the Sick; the defending the Oppressed; the feeding the Hungry; the cloathing the Naked; the vindicating the Credit of those whom we know to be falsely accused; the repairing the Fortunes of such as from a plentiful Condition may have fallen into Want, by *lending to them freely, hoping for nothing* Luke vi. again, and remitting to them all such Debts, <sup>35.</sup> as cannot be expected but by Severities which will quite oppress and ruin them; the giving warning to those who are like to be ensnared by crafty Men; the moderating our Resentment of the Offences which Men commit against us, the abating as much as we can of the Punishment to which the Rigour of Justice would expose them, and the putting them to no more pain and uneasiness than is necessary for the correction of their Tempers, the Safety of the Publick, and our own Reparation and Security for the future: These are Acts of Mercy, which we are to perform to our unfortunate Brethren, with respect to their

I  
temporal



SERM. temporal Concerns. This Relief and Assistance

III. of the Distressed, is the most substantial Expression of Mercy that can be; and without it, it is certain, that all the Pity that we can entertain for them, and all our kind Wishes for their Prosperity, and all the good Words that we can give them, will signify nothing at all. St. *John* cautions us against expressing our Kindness to our Brethren only in civil and courteous Words, and exhorts us to make it

1 John iii. appear in more real and lasting Effects. *My little Children, let us not love in Word or in Tongue, but in Deed, and in Truth.* And

St. *James* teaches us the Vanity and Unprofitableness of giving bare Complements to our miserable Brethren, while we withhold from them that Support which we are able to afford them. *If a Brother or a Sister be naked and destitute of daily Food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, Be ye warmed, and Be ye filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things, which are needful to the Body, what doth it profit?* Such fair Speeches are of no use to unhappy Men, nor do they prove us to be Persons of a humane and merciful Disposition. The Principles of Humanity and Compassion must certainly have but very little force in our Hearts, when the utmost Effect of them consists in kind

Jam ii.  
15, 16.

Words,



Words, and they do not appear in those beneficent Actions, which we have an Opportunity and Ability for performing.

Another important Duty here mentioned by our Saviour, is *Faith*. By this we are not to understand what is commonly meant by the word Faith in Scripture, the Assent of the Mind to the Truth of some Propositions or Matters of Fact, upon the Authority of God, who reveals them; but *Faithfulness* or *Fidelity* in our Conversation and Dealings with all with whom we have any thing to do. This the word frequently signifies, and it appears to be the Meaning of it in this place, because this Faithfulness is a Virrue of the same Rank and Kind with the other Virrues which our Saviour speaks of, which are all good and amiable in themselves; whereas the Belief of Divine Revelation has no intrinsic Goodness, but derives its whole Value from the Principles from whence it springs and the Efficacy which it has for producing the Virtues which are essentially worthy and lovely in us. This Fidelity consists in having a strict Regard to Truth in our common Conversation with Mankind, and in using such simplicity and plainness of Expression that they may easily understand our real Meaning; in performing all our religious Vows and Promises to

SERM. to God, and in fulfilling all our Covenants and

III. Engagements with Men; in discharging, according to our best Skill and Ability, all Offices and Trusts committed to us, either for the publick Good, or the Advantage of particular Persons; in being true and constant in our Friendships till we have some just cause to alter; and in promoting carefully the Interest of all, whom either by our Words, or our Behaviour, we have encouraged to have a dependance upon us. Contrary to this is Lying, Dissimulation, the misleading Men by artful and equivocal Words, Flattery, extravagant Complements and high Professions of Kindness which do not proceed from the Heart, Perjury, Breach of Promise, the laying hold on some little Circumstances and Points of Law to evade an equitable Obligation, Treachery or Remissness in the execution of any important Trusts or Offices, Falshood in matters of Friendship, and Neglect of the Interest of those whom we have allowed to have a Confidence in us. These things are all manifestly inconsistent with Truth or Faithfulness, and if we would practise this Virtue, we must always diligently guard against them.

The last Virtue which our Saviour speaks of, is the *Love of God*. There are two things commonly



commonly included or presupposed in Love SERM.  
towards rational Agents, Approbation or Es- III.  
teem, and the Desire of Happiness. The  
last, which is most properly Love, naturally  
arises in us towards Men considered only as  
sensitive Beings, if there be no interfering of  
Interests, and no Apprehension of an incurable  
evil Temper in them to obstruct it: The  
first proceeds only from a perception of the  
morally good Qualities of Persons. There is  
not always room for our having any consider-  
able Esteem of Men, even when we may  
have a hearty Good-will to them, and be  
sincerely desirous of their Felicity; because the  
good Qualities on which our Esteem is found-  
ed, are sometimes not to be observed in them,  
or only in a small degree, and so as to be  
overballanced by contrary evil Qualities. But  
the Case is otherwise with respect to God:  
He is possessed of the greatest moral Worth  
and Goodness that can be; his Nature is en-  
tirely and unalterably excellent and lovely; so  
that he is the Object both of our highest Es-  
teem and Veneration, and of our most sincere  
and hearty Good-will. And in thinking as  
reverently and honourably of him as we can,  
and in being most sincerely disposed to submit  
to his Will, to observe his Commandments,  
and to do whatever we apprehend will be  
pleasing

SERM. pleasing and agreeable to him, our Love of

III. him consists. The Scriptures always insist upon our Obedience to the Commandments of God, as the chief part of our Love of him, and the best Proof of its Sincerity. *This is the Love of God, says St. John, that we keep his Commandments. Whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected; that is, he loves God truly, and he loves him in perfection, so far as the present Infirmary of his Nature will allow him to do it.*

Perhaps some may think, that besides the Virtues here enumerated by our Saviour, as *the Weightier Matters of the Law*, or the most important Duties of Religion, there is another that deserves to be placed in the same order, which is *Sobriety or Temperance*. Now this, it is certain, is a very excellent and important Duty, and is in some places of Scripture particularly mentioned as a most essential and necessary part of Religion. But yet our Saviour's Enumeration may be thought just and full; because the Virtue of Temperance is included in those which he has mentioned, or it must be necessarily practised by us in order to our exercising them. For it is plain, that whoever would discharge the Offices of Justice, Humanity and Fidelity, which he

owes

owes to Mankind, and perform those Acts of SERM.  
Piety which are comprehended in the Love III.  
of God, must be careful to moderate his Ap-  
petites and Desires of private Pleasure, so as  
that they may never prompt him to any  
Actions which would be injurious, treache-  
rous, or cruel to Men, and displeasing to  
God; or which would impair his Health, or  
stupify his Mind, and so render him unfit for  
performing his Duty to God and Men; in  
which Moderation of our private Appetites  
and Affections, Sobriety or Temperance con-  
sists. And the same is true of every Duty  
which is reckoned among the moral Virtues,  
and makes a part of that amiable Temper, the  
forming of which in us, is represented in Scrip-  
ture, as the principal Design of Religion; as  
*Humility, Meekness, Patience*, and the like;  
that they are all comprehended in the Virtues,  
which our Saviour gives as Instances of the  
chief parts of Religion, or so necessarily con-  
nected with them, that it is impossible to prac-  
tise these mentioned by our Lord, without  
practising those other Virtues also.

II. I proceed now to shew that these Vir-  
tues which our Saviour has mentioned as the  
principal Duties of Religion, are indeed the  
most important and necessary parts of it, and  
which above all other things in it deserve our  
Pains and Care.

And



SERMON. And this may be made abundantly evident  
 III. both from the Principles of Reason, and the  
 Declarations of Divine Revelation.

It will appear from Reason, that the Virtues of Justice, Mercy, Faithfulness, and the Love of God, must be the Substance and End of any Religion which God would institute among Men; whether we consider the Nature of God, or Man.

If we consider the Nature of God, he, according to the account which St. *John* gives of him, is *Love*, a Being of absolute and perfect Goodness, who made the World, and preserves it for the benefit and welfare of his Creatures; who intends particularly the Happiness of Mankind in all his Dispensations towards them. It is not therefore to be thought that he would institute a Religion among them, the chief Design of which would not be to engage them to those things which are the great Causes and Means of their Happiness, which are evidently the Virtues of Justice, Fidelity, Humanity, Charity, and the Love of God himself. Without these Virtues, Life would soon become a Burthen to Men, and they could have no Satisfaction or Enjoyment in it. It is the practice of them, which renders human Society agreeable and comfortable to us; they yield us by far the most pleasing

1 John iv.  
 8, 16.

pleasing Sensations of any of which we are conscious; they adorn and perfect our Nature, and prepare us for the most noble and delightful Employments in a future State of Existence.

Since then the Happiness of Mankind depends so necessarily upon these Virtues, and flows so directly from them, it may be most rationally supposed, that they would be the things which a Being of perfect Goodness would principally have a regard to in any Revelation, and in any Laws which he would give to us; and that he would lay much greater stress upon them, than upon other things, which are not so necessary, nor tend so immediately to the End, which is evidently most worthy of him in his Dealings with Men, the promoting their Interest and Happiness.

Again: If we consider the Nature of Man; we are so constituted that we cannot but admire and delight in Justice, Faithfulness, Mercy, Charity and the Love of God, more than in any other Duties, which can be required by the Laws of Religion. The wise and good Author of our Beings, has taken care, in forming us, that these Virtues which are so necessary to our Happiness, and which give us the greatest Pleasures of which we are capable, should carry the most lovely Appearance to us; so that we cannot seriously attend to

SERM. them, but we must be charmed with them,

III. and above all other things esteem and pursue them.

Whoever with any care reflects upon himself, and observes the Tempers and Behaviour of Men, will soon be convinced that this is a just Account of the Frame of our Nature. Now from hence it may be concluded, that the great stress of any Religion, which comes from Heaven, will be laid upon these Virtues, which our Nature determines us thus to approve; for it would be manifestly absurd and unworthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, to suppose that he would appoint a Religion to Mankind, which would not correspond with the Nature which he has given them; or which would oblige us, contrary to the inward Sense of our Minds, and the generous Propensions of our Hearts, to pursue any thing more, or so much as these Virtues, in which we discern the greatest Worth and Excellence. It may indeed be agreeable to the Wisdom and Mercy of God, to propose some Doctrines to be believed by Men, in order to the strengthening their natural Disposition to the Virtues, which appear so amiable and excellent to them, and which are the great and immediate Causes of their Happiness, and the supporting them against all Temptations to the contrary; and likewise to require from them the Observation of



of some Forms and Ceremonies, which may have a tendency to the same Purposes. This he has done, and the Infirmities of Men made it very expedient for him to do so. But if the whole, or the principal Intention of any Religion was to gain our Assent to some speculative Doctrines, or to engage us to the Observance of some external Rites, a wise Man would hardly be persuaded of its Divine Original; but whatever Pretences were made use of to support its Authority, he would be very apt to reject it as an Imposture.

S E R M.  
III.  


Thus it appears very evidently, upon the Principles of Reason, that the Virtues which our Saviour instances in as the principal matters of Religion, are really the most important and necessary Parts of it, and which more than any other things in it deserve to be regarded by us.

The same thing is still farther evident from the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, or the Declarations of Divine Revelation.

The Scriptures every where lay the greatest weight upon these amiable Virtues, and represent the Practice of them as the main End of Religion. Under the Old Testament, it is true that God prescribed to the *Jews*, a great number of ceremonious external Performances; but it is plain, that these were

SERM. things of very little importance, even in their

III. Religion, in comparison of Justice, Equity, Humanity, and the Love of God. The Rites and Ceremonies of the Law, may indeed be reasonably supposed, to have been instituted with a view to secure and promote more effectually the practice of these Virtues: It is certain, that whenever the Observation of them was not accompanied with moral Duties, God was so far from regarding it, that he rejected it with the utmost Indigna-

Isa. i. 11. *tion and Abhorrence. To what purpose is the Multitude of your Sacrifices to me, saith the Lord? I am full of the Burnt-Offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts, and I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-Goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations, Incense is an Abomination unto me; the New Moons, and Sabbaths, the calling of Assemblies I cannot away with, it is Iniquity, even the solemn Meeting. Your New Moons, and your appointed Feasts my Soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your Hands, I will hide mine Eyes from you; yea, when ye make many Prayers, I will not hear: Your Hands are full of Blood.*

ter

ter which, he declares to them the proper SERM.  
Method of worshipping and serving him; III.

*Wash ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your doings from before mine Eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, says the Prophet Micah, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-Offerings, with Calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, or with ten thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my first-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? The Prophet speaks this in the name of one, inquiring into the most acceptable Methods of appeasing and worshipping the Deity; and the Answer returned to him is this: He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? And there are many more Passages in the sacred Writings of the Old Testament, which plainly teach us, that the Duties of Justice, Truth, Integrity, Mercy, and Goodness in our Conversation with Mankind, and an humble and reverent Deportment towards God, are the most excellent and important things in Reli-*

Micah vi.  
6—8.



SERM. gion, and far more esteemed by God, than all  
 III, the Sacrifices and other Ceremonies of the  
*Jews*, which were accepted by him only when  
 they were in conjunction with these Virtues,  
 for the sake of which chiefly, they had been  
 appointed.

And now if these Virtues were of so much  
 Importance under the *Jewish* Dispensation, it  
 may well be thought that they will not be  
 less valuable under the Gospel; which is a far  
 more plain and simple Institution, than the  
*Jewish* Religion was. Indeed the great Inten-  
 tion of Christianity is so evidently to engage  
 Men to Righteousness, Truth, and Charity,  
 and to the Love of God or true Piety, that  
 it is unnecessary to quote particular passages to  
 prove it. Whoever with any Attention looks  
 into the *New Testament*, will soon perceive  
 that our Saviour has, in a particular man-  
 ner, in almost all his Discourses, inculcated  
 these Virtues; that he has laid the greatest  
 stress of his Religion upon them, and made  
 the eternal Happiness of his Followers to de-  
 pend upon their practising them; and that  
 by his own Conduct and Example, he has  
 also taught us to prefer them to all other Du-  
 ties; and that his *Apostles* have likewise given  
 us the most earnest Exhortations to them,  
 and have mentioned them as the chief Ingre-  
 dients

dients in Religion, in those Descriptions which they have delivered of it; and that the Faith of the Gospel, and all the positive Institutions of it, are of use, only when they are the means of promoting these divine and amiable Virtues in us, which are declared to be the End and Perfection of all Religion. \*

SERM. III.

III. I shall make some useful Reflections upon this Subject.

I. From what has been said, we may entertain a very favourable Opinion of Christianity. For what can be a greater Recommendation of any Religion to us, than that it is framed and designed to promote in Men all those Virtues, which are most agreeable to human Nature, and are the immediate Sources of our truest Happiness? Certainly if this just Account of the Nature and Tendency of the Christian Religion was always attended to, the World must have a very advantageous Idea of it; at least, all who are the Friends of Virtue and of Mankind must esteem it as a wise and excellent Institution, and which is every way worthy of a Divine Author. In-

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deed

\* If any would see particular Proofs of this, he may, among other Places, read *Matth.* v. vi. vii. chap. xii. chap. 13. xxv. 31 — 46. *Phil.* iv. 8, 9. *Jam.* i. 27. *Ephes.* v. 9. *Gal.* v. 6, 22, 23. *Tit.* ii. 11, 12. *1 Tim.* i. 5.

SERM. deed if some are for giving us different Re-  
 III presentations of Christianity, and instead of  
 making it to consist chiefly in those Virtues,  
 which are intrinsically good and excellent,  
 and which are so useful and beneficial to  
 Mankind, they are for placing it in things  
 absurd, trifling, or hurtful; in the belief of  
 unintelligible Notions, or Opinions contradic-  
 tory to common Sense and Reason; or in the  
 Observance of some little Rites and Usages,  
 which, it can never be supposed a Being of  
 infinite Wisdom and Goodness, can lay any  
 stress on; or in a furious Zeal and Contem-  
 ption for some favourite Speculations and Ce-  
 rimonies, and a cruel Persecution of all who  
 differ from us about them: If some, I say,  
 are for giving us such Representations as these  
 of the Christian Institution; they may, per-  
 haps, find it difficult to reconcile the confide-  
 rate part of Mankind to it. The Religion  
 of our Saviour, in these Views, does not ap-  
 pear to be so lovely and divine a thing, as it  
 does in those plain Accounts, which he him-  
 self and his Apostles have delivered of it;  
 according to which the great Intention of it  
 is to raise and improve in us, all those Vir-  
 tues, which are most excellent in their nature,  
 and which tend most directly to the Honour  
 of God, the Comfort and Happiness of Man-  
 kind



kind in general, and the Happiness and Per- SERM.  
fection of every Man in particular. This is III.

a Design which very well deserves to be countenanced by the God of all Wisdom and Mercy; and the Religion which effectually prosecutes this design, will insinuate itself into the Hearts of all good Men, and command their Love and Approbation.

2. From what has been discoursed, we may see the great Importance of Moral Duties, and the necessity of inculcating them upon Christians. It is wonderful to observe the contemptuous Opinion which some Persons entertain of Morality, who speak of it as a thing with which Religion is but little or no way concerned, in which if it has any place, it is only the lowest and least considerable; and who, in consequence of this Notion of it, cannot endure to hear it much or earnestly pressed upon Men; this, according to their common way of expressing themselves, being all legal and carnal, and not preaching Christ or the Gospel; It might, perhaps, have done well enough, according to them, for a *Heathen* Philosopher to have spent his time in explaining and recommending the several parts of Moral Virtue to his Scholars; but this cannot be the Business of a Teacher of Christianity, who has some far more spiritual, sublime, and useful

SERM. useful Subjects to entertain himself and his

III. Hearers with. A little Conversation in the World may convince us, that these are the Sentiments, which many, who imagine themselves to be great Proficients in the Knowledge of Religion, have of the Duties of Morality, and the Virtues of a good Life. But whence-soever they may have derived these Notions, it is certain, that they have not received them from any Principles either of Reason, or Revelation. For both these agree in placing moral Duties at the top of all Religion; in making them the matters which God principally values in it, and which it became him above all other things to require from Men. These therefore, every wise Man will account the Substance of his Religion, and will lay no stress upon other matters in comparison of them. And whoever would teach Religion to any valuable purpose, must chiefly inculcate these Duties upon Men. Nothing can be more weak and absurd, than to object against the preaching of Morality, as if it was not preaching Christ. What! Can any thing be more properly called preaching Christ, than preaching the most essential Duties of his Religion; than preaching what He himself and his Apostles constantly, and with the greatest Earnestness preached, and required from

from Men, as absolutely necessary to their an- SERM.  
swering the End of Religion, and partaking III.  
of the Benefits of it? Does any one really  
imagine, that there is a different Notion of  
this matter delivered in the Scriptures; and  
when we read in the History of the *Acts*,  
that the Apostles taught and preached *Jesus*  
*Christ*, and when St. *Paul* speaks of his  
preaching *Christ crucified* among the *Corin-*  
*thians*, that all that they intended to do, was  
to instruct Men in some Notions and Doctrines  
relating to the Person, Office, and Death of  
*Christ*? It is indeed certain, that the Apostles  
were at a great deal of pains to convince the  
World, that *Jesus* was really the *Messiah* and  
Son of God, as he gave out himself to be, and  
to open the true Design of his death, and  
to remove the Objections which the *Jews* and  
*Gentiles* brought against Christianity upon the  
account of it; but after that, were they solli-  
citous about nothing farther? Is it not evident  
from the whole Tenour of their Discourses,  
that they never laid the least weight upon any  
Opinions and Doctrines, but only as they were  
the means of producing a good Life; and that  
therefore the only use which they could make  
of any Doctrines which they delivered con-  
cerning *Christ*, was to propose them as so ma-  
ny Motives to engage Men more effectually to  
the



SERMON. the Obedience of the Laws of Christ, or to  
 III. practise those Moral Virtues which are requir-  
 ed by his Religion, which are indeed the Sum  
 and Substance, the Aim and End of all true  
 Religion. Let no Man therefore think meanly  
 of Morality or despise the Preaching of it, as  
 useless and unedifying. All Principles which  
 lead Men to scorn or neglect it, which make  
 Religion something different from it, or above  
 it, which prefer some speculative Notions and  
 Points of Belief, or an attendance on the ex-  
 ternal Duties and Ceremonies of divine Wor-  
 ship, or any other matters whatsoever before it,  
 are most apparently false, and have a fatal Ten-  
 dency to defeat the intention of Christianity,  
 and to make it good for nothing; and not only  
 so, but to render it a thing of very pernicious  
 consequence to Men, as it will prove, in the  
 false light in which such Principles set it, the  
 occasion of quieting their Consciences, and  
 administering Peace and Comfort to them in  
 the practice of Vice and Wickedness.

3. Lastly, From what has been said, we  
 may learn, whither our Endeavours in Religi-  
 on should tend, and what are the things in it,  
 for which we should exert the greatest Zeal.  
 We are indeed to reverence the least of God's  
 Commandments, and to perform every Duty  
 which he requires from us. But we must  
 more

more especially practise those Duties, which are most excellent in their own nature, and of the greatest moment in Religion; which, as I have shewn, are the Duties of Justice, Mercy, Integrity and the Love of God. We must therefore be above all things careful to raise and cultivate these Virtues in ourselves, and make our Belief of the Doctrines of the Gospel, and our Attendance on the external Institutions of it, entirely subservient to this purpose: And we are never to imagine ourselves sufficiently religious, because we believe truly, and pray frequently, and read the Scriptures every day, and go to all the Sermons that we can hear, and take all occasions of partaking of the Lord's Supper. The End of Religion consists, not in these things, but in those upright, humane, and generous Dispositions with respect to Mankind, and that reverent and obedient Temper towards God, which they are intended to raise and increase in us. And we only use them to good purpose, when we are improved in such Affections, and such a Temper by them. There are a great many Persons, I know, who are apt to run into a mistake in this matter, to be exceedingly concerned about the external and ceremonial parts of their Religion, while those things in which the Life and Substance of it consist, are almost entirely

SERMON, entirely neglected by them. This was an Error

III.

for which the Jewish Nation almost continually went into, for which their Prophets never failed most severely to reprove them.

And there have been multitudes of Christians in all Ages who have imitated their Example, and fallen into the same Mistake, notwithstanding that the Gospel has removed that, which probably might have been the occasion of leading the Jews so easily into it, the load of external Rites with which their Religion was encumbered; and notwithstanding it is so plain an Institution, and appears so evidently to consist principally in those Virtues which are seated in the Heart and Mind. I am far from intending to discourage any Man's Zeal, even about the lowest Instances of his Duty, provided it does not make him negligent about those which are of greater consequence. Let those who have leisure from the discharge of more important Offices, pray as frequently and devoutly, let them read the Scriptures as carefully and diligently, and let them attend on all the external Institutions and Rites of Religion as punctually and exactly as they can. If they do these things with an honest Intention of improving and confirming themselves in the practice of Virtue, they will certainly find them highly useful for these purposes, and they



they will be exceedingly blameable if they omit them. But when Men are for placing the whole or the greatest part of their Religion in these external Duties, which are appointed as Means and Helps to the practice of moral Virtue; and when after they have gone their usual round of praying, reading, hearing, meditating, and receiving the Communion; they imagine that they have acquitted themselves of their Duty, and are become very acceptable to God, tho' it may be evident to them, upon the least Reflection, that all these devotional Exercises have made but few or no good Impressions at all upon their Minds; it is extremely necessary to let them know that they are under a gross Delusion, that these Duties, as they manage them, have no Religion at all in them, but must be looked upon to be only the Effects of Superstition or Enthusiasm. Let us take care therefore to exert our Zeal in Religion, proportionably to the value of its several Duties; let our chief Concern be employed about the Virtues of Justice, Fidelity, Humanity, and the Love of God, which are most evidently the End of Religion, which recommend themselves to us by their own intrinsic Worth and Goodness, and which we are bound, above all things, to practise by the most sacred and unalterable of all Laws, that  
of

SERM. of our own Nature. Let the raising and in-

III. creasing these amiable Virtues in us, be the  
 End of our Faith, and all our Inquiries after  
 Truth and Knowledge, and of our use of the  
 instrumental Duties of Christianity: And  
 when at any time there happens to be a Com-  
 petition between these and any Duties of an  
 inferiour nature, so that we cannot perform  
 both; let us always give the preference to  
 these excellent and important Virtues. Let us  
 take all Opportunities of doing just, kind,  
 friendly, and useful Actions, tho' our doing  
 so, may sometimes prevent our observing some  
 positive Precepts of the Gospel, or our attend-  
 ing on the outward Duties of Devotion. This  
 is certainly the way to act most agreeably to  
 the Nature and Intention of Religion, and to  
 offer the most acceptable Worship and Service  
 to the Deity, who has required Homage and  
 Obedience from Mankind to himself, for the  
 more effectual Advancement of their Welfare  
 and Happiness. To him may all Glory and  
 Praise be given, both now, and for ever.

*Amen.*

SERMON

# SERMON IV.

## The Government of the Heart.

Prov. IV. 23.

*Keep thy Heart with all Diligence; for out of it are the Issues of Life.*

**T**HERE is not any Precept which better deserves our Attention, and which we are more concerned to observe, than this which Solomon here gives us; for upon our complying with it, the good Conduct and Happiness of our Lives depend. The Method in which I shall discourse of it, is this:

I. I shall explain what is meant by *keeping the Heart*.

II. I shall consider the Argument, which is used to engage us to this Practice of *keeping the Heart*; because *out of it are the Issues of Life*.

VOL. I.

H

III. I



SERM. III. I shall lay down some Rules to direct  
 IV. and assist us in *keeping* or governing our Hearts.

*First*, I shall explain what is meant by *keeping the Heart*. The Heart in Scripture, and in all Writers of Morality, comprehends all the Desires, Passions, and Affections, and every thing that is a Principle of Action in the Mind of Man; and the keeping of it in general consists in a due Regulation of our several Desires and Affections, in a just Arrangement of all the inward Movements and Principles of the Mind; so as that the higher and nobler Principles of our Nature may always prevail, and restrain and direct every lower Principle and Inclination in us, which are naturally placed in a state of Subordination to them. In order therefore to our understanding distinctly the Meaning of this Precept, it will be necessary to consider a little the several Affections and Principles of Action which belong to the human Nature, the just Order of their operating, and to which of them the Right of directing and governing the rest belongs. And to come to the knowledge of these matters, there is not so much need of any long Reasoning, as of a careful Reflection upon ourselves, and Attention to what we inwardly feel and are conscious passes in

our own Breasts. It is not, however, to be expected, that I should here distinctly enumerate all the particular Passions and Affections of Mankind, and shew how they regularly exert themselves, and how far each of them is to be indulged: To do this, would be tedious, and carry us by far too great a length on this Occasion. It will be sufficient to take notice of some general Dispositions and Principles in our Nature, which include our particular Affections, and to shew how these are to be regulated; what sort of Affections should be most cultivated, and which Principle is to controul and guide all other Principles within us. The Principles and Affections implanted in the human Nature, which I shall mention are these following.

1. The Principles of Self-Love, and such Affections as tend to our own private Good and Happiness. That these are a part of our Constitution, that we are so framed that we cannot but desire and seek the Preservation of our Beings, and the Gratification of all those Senses and Powers in us, whereby we are capable of receiving Pleasure, every Person may perceive from his own Experience; the common Pursuits of Mankind sufficiently prove it; and it is indeed a thing so certain, and so

SERM. universally known, that none have any doubts  
IV. about it at all.

2. There are benevolent Principles and publick Affections implanted in us, which incline us to promote the Interest and Happiness of others. These are altogether as essential to our Nature, as our selfish and private Affections are: All the Devotion and Love which we express to the Deity, all the Compassion, natural Affection, Friendship, Gratitude, Generosity, and Love of a Country, which are among Mankind, are Instances of our Benevolence, and particular Branches of it. If any Person says, that he has never perceived any of these Affections in himself, he has certainly never seriously reflected upon the State of his own Heart, or he belyes himself, and is willing to appear less amiable than he really is. And if any who is sensible that there are such Affections in Mankind, yet affirms that they are not disinterested, and that the Happiness of others is not the End of them, but that they are only the Effects of Self-Love exerted in an artful manner for advancing our own Interest, he asserts what is very absurd, and what every honest and kind Heart can confute from what it constantly feels in itself. Indeed nothing but the greatest Inattention, or the most unreasonable Prejudice

dice



dice or Affection can make any deny that **SERM.**  
there are kind disinterested Affections in **IV.**  
Mankind, which must be as evident as almost  
any thing whatever is, to every Mind that re-  
flects upon itself, and fairly considers the Con-  
duct of Men, a great part of which cannot  
possibly be accounted for upon any other Sup-  
position, than their being possessed of such  
Affections. It is true that some greatly di-  
minish the Strength of these Affections in  
themselves, and act in direct contradiction to  
them in many Instances: And in like manner,  
some others may be found who very much  
weaken their selfish Affections, and act in-  
consistently with their own Interest in several  
Cases. But it cannot hence be inferred, that  
either the first are destitute of all benevolent  
Affections, or that the latter are void of the  
Principles of Self-Love. The worst of Men  
never extinguish all generous and humane Af-  
fections in their Hearts, nor do those who  
are most negligent about their own Interest,  
entirely shake off all Regard for themselves.  
Both the selfish and benevolent Principles may  
indeed be raised so high, that the one sort shall  
far overballance and bear down the other;  
but yet those which are suppressed will still  
retain some Force in the Heart; and it is

SERM. certain that the Affections of both kinds are

IV. natural to Mankind.

Besides these Principles, there is another implanted in our Nature, whereby we judge of Tempers, Affections, Characters, and Actions, both in ourselves and others, and approve and delight in some, and disapprove and have an Aversion to others. This Principle which some have called a reflex Affection, and which is more commonly known by the Name of Conscience, is certainly a main part in our Constitution. There is no Person who may not be conscious of such a Power in himself. All who have not corrupted their Hearts must be extremely sensible of the Force of it: And though others, by acquiring false Opinions, and indulging themselves in evil Habits, may very much weaken and impair it, yet, they can never wholly destroy it, or root it out of their Nature. The most debauched and profligate of all Mankind have still some Remains of Conscience in them; they appear in several Instances to be struck with the Beauty and Excellency of certain Characters and certain Methods of Behaviour, and discern a Deformity and Baseness in the contrary; and they conduct themselves in some measure accordingly.

Different

Different from all these Principles is the **SERM.**  
Power or Faculty of Reason, which is our **IV.**

great Instrument for discovering Truth, and acquainting ourselves with the Natures and Relations of things. But this not being an immediate Principle of Action in us, does not at present come under our Consideration. The great use of this Faculty with respect to the Government of the Heart, I shall have Occasion to take notice of before I conclude. It remains now to be considered, how these several Principles, which include our particular Desires and Affections, or by far the greatest part of them, and such as principally influence our Conduct, are to be exerted; which of them should chiefly prevail and govern the other Principles and Affections in our Nature.

It is certain that, our Nature being the Work of a perfectly wise and good Being, no part of us has been made in vain, and there are not any Principles and Affections in our Minds, which are either to be rooted out, or totally suppressed. All of them are necessary in such Creatures as we are, and the Exercise of them within their proper Bounds serves the most useful and excellent Purposes.



SERM. Our selfish Affections appear plainly to be

IV. necessary in order to our own Preservation;  
for making us active and diligent in providing the things which tend to the Support and Comfort of our Beings, which we would be too indolent and slothful to seek with sufficient Care, even though we were fully acquainted with the Virtue of them to support us and yield us Pleasure, unless we were excited to acquire them, by these powerful Sollicitors within ourselves. Our benevolent Affections are likewise necessary for engaging us to the pursuit of a general and publick Interest, and making us perform the Offices of Love and Gratitude which we owe to God, and the Acts of Charity, Friendship, and Humanity, which we owe to Mankind, in the various Relations in which we stand to them; which would certainly be too much neglected by us, however excellent they are in themselves, and how much soever the Comfort and Happiness of human Society depend upon them, if we were destitute of these kind and generous Propensions of our Nature. And the other Principle of Reflection or Conscience which belongs to us, is also most necessary and useful for directing us to a just Exercise of our Affections with respect to ourselves and others, and for determining and  
exciting

exciting us to the most noble, upright, and worthy Pursuits. So that the Affections and Principles implanted in us, being necessary for such valuable Purposes, none of them are to be suppressed; all of them must have some Influence upon us; our selfish Affections must lead to take care of our own Happiness; and our benevolent Dispositions must attach us to the whole System of rational Beings, and particularly lead us to consult the Happiness of the Communities of which we are Members, and to advance the Welfare of our Friends and Dependants, and even of all Men to whom our Power can reach; and the Principle of Conscience must guide us in the Exercise of both these sorts of Affections, and always incline us to act the most worthy, generous, and honourable part in Life. Whoever reflects upon the several Affections and Principles implanted in him, will easily perceive that this Principle last mentioned, is the highest one in his Nature; which is placed in him on purpose to regulate all other Principles in his Heart, and to guide him to a good and generous Behaviour. All who feel such a Principle or Faculty in themselves, must be sensible that this is its Right and Office; that by it they are *a Law to themselves*, and that they cannot contradict

or

SERM. or disobey its Decisions, without violating  
 IV. their Nature in the properest Sense, and in a  
 quite different manner from that in which  
 they violate it, by contradicting any other  
 Principle or Affection within them \*. This  
 therefore being the chief Principle in the  
 Mind, to which the Government of all other  
 inward Principles and Affections belongs, the  
*keeping of the Heart* consists in having all  
 these in subjection to this superiour Principle,  
 and in exercising them according to its  
 Dictates and Directions.

Now this Principle, in perfect conformity  
 to the revealed Law of God, which, for the  
 most important part of it, is nothing but a  
 Transcript of the Law which is born with us,  
 and naturally *written in our Hearts*, requires  
 us to indulge our selfish Affections, and pursue  
 our own Happiness, so far as is requisite  
 for the preservation of our Beings, and the  
 keeping us in the fittest Capacity for  
 discharging the Duties which we owe to God  
 and to Mankind; and it allows us to enjoy  
 all the Pleasures which we can innocently  
 partake of, that is, all the Pleasures which  
 we can receive without breaking through the  
 Obligations

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\* See this Point fully illustrated in the 2d of Dr. Butler's  
 Sermons preached at the Rolls.



Obligations of Religion, Justice, or Charity. S E R M.

But whenever our selfish Affections become so violent, as for the sake of our private Pleasure and Satisfaction to make us do things which are displeasing to God, or injurious to Society, or which hinder us from exercising our Compassion and Charity towards those who stand in need of our Assistance, our Consciences always disapprove of them. As the Scripture condemns this immoderate Selfishness, by the name of the *Flesh*, which it commands us to subdue and mortify *with all its Affections and Lusts*; so the Principle, which is the Judge of what passes within us, and approves or disapproves of our Temper and Affections, condemns it also, and prohibits our carrying our Regard to ourselves so high, as to prevail over our generous Dispositions, and become the Occasion either of our counter-acting the Will of the supreme Being, or of our introducing Confusion and Misery into the Affairs of Men, which it constantly represents as evil and vicious to us. This Principle which judges of our Tempers, and is to govern all other Principles and Affections in us, approves of our benevolent and publick Affections, and directs us to the most vigorous Exercise of them. These Affections it always admires and recommends

as

SER M. as amiable and virtuous: They are indeed, the  
 IV great Foundation of the Beauty and Excellence,  
 which, by means of this Faculty, we perceive  
 to be in any Characters or Actions. Our Con-  
 sciences approve of every degree of Benevo-  
 lence, and every particular friendly Affection,  
 which is not inconsistent with some more gene-  
 rous and extensive Affections, and the Pursuit  
 of the general Happiness of the World: They  
 more especially approve of strong degrees of  
 Good-will to Persons of Dignity and Excel-  
 lence, and who are of great importance to  
 Mankind; and a Love of the Publick, or any  
 large Societies and Bodies of Men; and an  
 universal Benevolence to all Men, and the study  
 of their Happiness, so far as it is in our power  
 to promote it. To have these Affections prevail-  
 ing always strongly in our Heart, exciting us to  
 all the Acts of a rational Piety towards God, and  
 to do all the good we can in the World, not only  
 the Doctrine of our Saviour, but the inward  
 Sense of our own Consciences also, teaches us to  
 be the most amiable and divine Temper that  
 we can be possessed of, and the Perfection of all  
 Virtue and Goodness. And when in pursu-  
 ance of the Dictates of our Consciences, we  
 keep our selfish Passions within due Bounds,  
 and never suffer them to carry us to the Ex-  
 cesses

cesses of Luxury, Intemperance, Avarice, Ambition, Envy, Revenge, or any thing which would either soften or enervate our Minds, and render us unfit for performing our Duty to God, and for acting a social and generous part with respect to Mankind; or, which would make us to transgress the Laws of God, and invade the Properties, or disturb the Peace of Men; when we indulge them principally with a view of keeping ourselves in the best Capacity for performing our Duty; when we give scope to the generous and publick Affections of our Nature, when these prompt us cheerfully to promote the Happiness not only of those who are nearly related to us, and who more immediately depend upon us, but of all with whom we converse that want our Help; when we entertain a high degree of Veneration and Love to all Persons of worthy and generous Characters, and more especially to God, the most excellent of all Beings, and the greatest Benefactor of Mankind; when we always prefer the publick to our private Interest, and endeavour to be as universally beneficent and useful, as our Knowledge of the Circumstances and Interests of Men, and our other Abilities will allow us to be; we then *keep our Hearts*: Every thing is right and harmonious within us, our Affections operate  
in



SERM. in a natural and just Order, and we may sur-

IV. *vey* our inward Frame with great Pleasure and Approbation.

Thus I have explained what is meant by *keeping the Heart*.

II. I proceed now to consider the Argument which is used to engage us to this Practice of *keeping the Heart*; because *out of it are the Issues of Life*.

By the *Issues of Life*, we may understand the Actions of Life, either good or bad; and also the Happiness or Misery of it; and so the meaning of the Argument is this: That we should be careful to keep and govern our Hearts aright; because, according as they are well or ill kept and governed by us, our Lives will be well or ill conducted, and rendered either happy or miserable to us.

I. We should be careful to *keep our Hearts*, because the good Conduct of our Lives depends on this. Our Affections are the Springs which put our active Powers into Motion, and keep them in it, proportionably to the degree of Strength, with which they prevail in us. If therefore these be kept in good order, our external Behaviour will be well ordered also. But every Disorder in the System of our inward Principles and Affections, will produce

a proportionable Disorder in our Life and **SERM.**  
Practice. When the Principle of Conscience **IV.**

maintains its Place and Authority, and gives Law to all other Principles within us, it will certainly guide us to a course of worthy and generous Actions, and our Characters will be very good and amiable. But when the inferior Principles, which are to be ruled by this higher one, usurp upon it and bear it down, they will lead us into a vicious and base Conduct. Every degree of such Usurpation, will produce some Irregularity in our Lives, something that will be a Blemish in our Characters; and when it becomes greater and more universal, when our Consciences are almost entirely laid waste, and are hardly ever suffered to do their Office, our Lives will be full of Enormities, and we shall forfeit all Character for Virtue and Goodness. It is possible indeed, that we may for some time dissemble and act a part which we do not inwardly approve: We may put on the Appearances of Devotion, Justice, Friendship, Liberality, and other Virtues, to which we have but little or no regard in our Hearts: But this Practice will be but of a short continuance; the Passions which most strongly and habitually prevail in us, will soon appear in their proper Effects in our Conversation, whatever Arts and Pains we  
may

SERMON may use to the contrary. And though our

IV. benevolent Dispositions, since they are natural to us, and are never to be wholly extinguished in us, may have some influence, and make us accidentally do some good and virtuous Actions; yet, when they are not strengthened and directed by the Principle which discerns the Beauty of them, and prompts us to the Cultivation and Exercise of them, they will not be exerted by us in such a steady and uniform manner, as will be sufficient to procure us the Character of virtuous Persons. Whatever good we may do upon some Occasions, from the natural Principles of Compassion and Benevolence, and from any small Remains of Conscience, or an Affection to moral Virtue that may be left in us, our ungoverned Passions will carry us into many great Crimes, which will exclude us from the number of the Virtuous, and fix upon us a vicious Character. *Out of our Hearts*, while they are so much disordered, will proceed evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, false Witnessing, Blasphemies, and other Vices which defile a Man.

Matth. xv.  
19, 20.

2. We should keep our Hearts, because the Happiness of our Lives likewise depends upon our doing so. When our Affections are kept in good order; when they are exercised according



According to the Directions of our Consciences, they will afford us the greatest Happiness that we can partake of. They will give us not only the full Enjoyment of the Pleasures of the external Senses, but a much higher delight in the Exercise of Piety, Justice, Humanity, Friendship, and Beneficence; They will procure us the Satisfaction which results from the Consciousness of our own Integrity and Goodness, and the Esteem and Love of the better part of Mankind, and the Approbation and Acceptance of God himself, which is certainly the most noble and valuable of all Enjoyments. But when we give loose Reins to our Passions and Affections, and suffer them to carry us whithersoever they will; when for gratifying our inordinate Desires, we break through all the Ties which Conscience and Religion lay upon us to the Exercise of Goodness, we do what will be extremely inconvenient, and bring the greatest Misery upon ourselves. They who are at no pains to govern their Hearts, but follow all the Motions of their Passions, without any regard to Conscience, and without ever considering whether what they lead them to be right or wrong, may indeed have some Pleasures from their irregular and vicious Pursuits, but can have none from them, which might

SERM. not have been enjoyed by them in a higher  
 IV. degree from the regular Exercise of their Affections. There is a Measure fixed by Nature for our Pleasures, beyond which if we endeavour to procure them, we shall certainly be disappointed. The moderate and natural Gratification of our Senses and Appetites is always agreeable and delightful to us; but if we will raise and force our Appetites, or endeavour to please them in a disorderly and unnatural way, the Gratification of them will cease to be agreeable, or it will be attended with more Uneasiness than Pleasure. The Intemperate find this, in that Sottishness and Stupidity, in those Nauseatings and Diseases, and untimely Deaths, which they frequently bring upon themselves by their Riots and Debauches; the Ambitious, in those endless Cares which they must be at to compass their Designs, and the shocking Disappointments which they often meet with, when they have done all that they can to accomplish them; the Covetous in that Anxiety and Distraction of Mind, which attends their eager pursuit of Wealth, and that Vexation which they feel upon the least Diminution of their Fortunes; and the Revengeful, in that Impatience, Fury, and Rage, which boil in their Breasts, and are not so tormenting to their



their Adversaries as to themselves. But sup-  
posing that those Persons, who indulge their  
Passions and Desires contrary to the Directions  
of Conscience and Religion, enjoyed all the  
Pleasure which their vicious Pursuits are capable  
of affording, without these grievous Abate-  
ments; yet, this would be no Compensation  
for the loss of the noble Pleasures, which flow  
from a generous, just, and kind Temper, and  
from a truly pious, upright, social, and bene-  
ficent Course of Life, which they must be al-  
together, or in a great measure, strangers to;  
for that Infamy and Contempt which their  
Vices will fix upon them, among the wise and  
sober part of the World; for the Reproaches  
and Condemnation of their own Consciences,  
and the Fears of a higher Judge, who will  
confirm the Sentence of their Consciences  
against them. The Condemnation of their own  
Hearts, and their Apprehensions of a future  
Punishment, are enough to make them mi-  
serable, if there was nothing else to disquiet  
them; nay, if they were possessed of all the  
outward means of Happiness and Enjoyment.  
The Consciousness of Guilt is the most grie-  
vous and insupportable Evil that can be; while  
it remains in the Mind, it is impossible that  
we can ever be satisfied or easy; it is a Worm  
which corrupts all our Pleasures, and frequent-



SERM. ly throws Men into the most dismal Agonies,  
 IV. and makes Life itself a Burthen to them. And  
 the Pain of it is rendered more intolerable by  
 the secret Suspicion and Dread of a future  
 Account and Reckoning, which for the most  
 part accompany guilty Reflections, and natu-  
 rally arise from them. Wicked Men feel the  
 extreme Torment of living in this state of Self-  
 condemnation and Terror of future Vengeance;  
 and therefore they endeavour to get rid of it  
 by stifling their Consciences, and banishing  
 away the Thoughts of Futurity, by engaging  
 in a hurry of Business, or immersing them-  
 selves in Pleasure; by disguising their Vices, or  
 cloathing them, in their Imaginations, with Ap-  
 pearances of innocent or good Qualities; or  
 by arguing themselves into an Opinion, that  
 there is no real difference between moral Good  
 and Evil, and no such thing as a Life after  
 this to be expected. And some, it is certain,  
 go a great length, in suppressing and corrupt-  
 ing their Consciences, and hardning themselves  
 against the *Powers of the World to come*. But  
 tho' by this Means they relieve themselves  
 from some present Pain and Suffering, yet,  
 upon the Whole, they do not make their Case  
 less miserable, but rather more so; for in pro-  
 portion as they bear down and debauch their  
 Consciences, they deprive themselves of all  
 moral

moral and social Pleasures, which alone can make Life, for any considerable time, comfortable or even desirable to us; and as they throw off the Restraints of Religion, and become insensible to these Motives which God has proposed for keeping them back from Vice, they sink the deeper into all kinds of Wickedness, and at last draw down upon themselves the greater Ruin and Misery. But it is not, I believe, possible for the worst of Men absolutely to suppress or corrupt their Consciences, and to be always free from their stinging Accusations and tormenting Reflections, and the Fears which they naturally suggest to them. They may, by a great deal of Art, for some time lay them asleep, and forget that they are in any danger of Punishment for their evil Deeds. But if they should fall into any great Adversity, that will probably awaken their Consciences, renew their Fears, and let loose those Furies which are lodged in their Breasts, with Violence and Rage against them; and especially the near Approach of Death will be apt to alarm them, and give them a most lively Sense of their Condition. When they find that they must leave this World, they will probably be too serious to think any longer of deluding themselves; or, if they should still attempt that, their artificial Colourings

SERM. and sceptical Cavils will then make but a  
 IV. very faint Impression; and when, beside this,  
 they will want all those Employments and Diversions, which in the time of their Health and Prosperity hindered them from reflecting, their Consciences will have leave to do their Office, and will not fail to accuse and challenge them with great Severity for the Impieties and Vices of their Lives; so that they will not have any joyful Reflections, or comfortable Hopes at the Time when they will stand most in need of such Supports. Nothing will be then in their Minds, but dark and gloomy Apprehensions, and perhaps the bitterest Remorse, Anguish, and Despair; which must certainly render them as wretched as it is almost possible to conceive they can be. So that it appears most evidently, that our Happiness is to be secured only by *keeping our Hearts*, or by the good Government of all our Passions and Affections.

III. I shall lay down some Rules to direct and assist us in keeping or governing our Hearts.

1. Since the *Keeping of the Heart* consists in having all the other Principles in the Mind, in subjection to the highest one of Conscience, that this may always govern them aright, and  
 never



never through any mistaken or partial Appearances of Good, engage us in such Pursuits as are absolutely evil, it is very necessary that we acquire just Notions of the Perfections of the Deity and steadily attend to them, and get a just View of the true Interests of all who are any way affected by our Conduct; and that we carefully consider the Nature and Tendency of our Actions, whether they are really agreeable to the Perfections and the Will of God, and likely to produce the most considerable Happiness which we are capable of being the Authors of to Mankind. Indeed Persons of plain honest Minds, and who are engaged only in the common Affairs of Life, need not reason or deliberate much about their acting; the good and just part will almost always appear to them at the first View; their Consciences, without any long Consideration, will lead them to such a Conduct, as will still be approved both by themselves, and all wise and impartial Observers. So that the best Advice that can be given to them is that delivered by one of the Hebrew Wise-Men, *In every good Work trust thy own Soul; for this is the keeping of the Commandments.* But since few are so happy as not to be some way influenced by Superstition or Enthusiasm in matters of Religion,

SERM.  
IV.

Ecclef.  
xxxii. 23.

SERM. by Party-Zeal, or some other evil Passions,

IV. or at least by a confused irregular Imagination, which often hide the Deformity of many Practices, which are really bad, from their Consciences, and represent them to them not only as innocent, but virtuous; and since in many Cases which will occur to us, if we have any great Affairs to conduct in the World, it will be difficult to discern the just Limits of Virtue and Goodness, however upright and unbiassed our Minds may be; it will be necessary to proceed with great Deliberation, and to use our Reason impartially, in examining whether the general Tenour of our Conduct, and particularly the Determinations which we come to in any difficult and intricate Cases, are such as will be pleasing to a wise and good Deity, and conducive to the Good and Happiness of Mankind; which the Consciences of all, even of those who are most corrupted, whenever they reflect at all, must above all things approve and recommend. This alone can defend us against the Power of superstitious and enthusiastick Notions, against the Influence of evil Passions, and a deluding Imagination, and prevent our running into many Mistakes in our Conversation in the World. And if we will faithfully employ the Reason with which God has endowed us, in  
comparing

comparing our Behaviour with what the inward Conviction and Sense of our Minds, and likewise the Declarations of God in that Revelation which he has given us, represent to us as the Sum of all Religion and Virtue, and the principal End of our Actions, that is, the expressing our sincere and fervent Love to God, and to Mankind; we shall perhaps soon find that many of those things, which we are exceedingly zealous for, under the pretence of honouring and serving God, can never be proper Expressions of our Respect and Love to him, because they are entirely disagreeable to his Nature, and can be acceptable only to a weak or cruel Being; and that many Actions which we may much value in ourselves, because they are rashly conceived to flow from a Sense of Honour, Fortitude, Generosity, Gallantry of Spirit, and other admired and useful Qualities, are very pernicious to the Publick, and occasion great Confusion and Misery in the World, and therefore can have no real Worth and Virtue in them at all. Thus, by calm and impartial Consideration, we shall be able to take a View of our Actions according to their true Nature; and when many of them, which are really evil, are stripped of those Appearances of Sanctity, Religion, Virtue, and Honour, under which they



SERM. they usually presented themselves to our Minds,

IV. our Consciences will detest them, and never  
 suffer us with any Peace to do them again.  
 And certainly it will be a very criminal Omis-  
 sion in us, not to employ our Reason for this  
 noblest Purpose for which it was given us,  
 the discovering the best Methods of pleasing  
 God, and of doing good in the World : Be-  
 sides the Neglect of this will be attended  
 with great Inconvenience to ourselves ; for  
 whether we will or no, we shall many times  
 be obliged to consider and reflect, and come  
 to see our Errors and Follies, which must  
 necessarily be the Occasion of bitter Sorrow  
 and Repentance to us.

2. That we may *keep our Hearts*, it will  
 be necessary to watch narrowly all our Passions  
 and Affections, which are apt to rebel against  
 our Consciences, and to check every Motion  
 of them towards that which is evil. It is not  
 perhaps always in our power, to hinder some  
 irregular Desires and Inclinations from arising  
 in us : But we may certainly refuse to comply  
 with them, or indulge them. And in this  
 the great Security of our Virtue lies. For  
 when we begin to tamper with vicious Inclina-  
 tions, and give way to them in some mea-  
 sure, it is hard to say when they will stop, and  
 whither they will carry us. Nothing can be  
 more

more foolish than to imagine that we shall be able to sin with great Coolness and Discretion, that we may hold in the Reins, and set bounds to our Passions as we please, that we may say to them, as the Almighty is represented saying to the Sea, *Hitherto you shall come, but no farther.* It is certain, that every Gratification of our evil Affections adds new Strength and Vigour to them; and it is not improbable, that after we have for some considerable time indulged them, they will get the mastery over us, and become too hard for all the Remonstrances of our Consciences, and all the pains that can be taken to subdue them. All of us perhaps may know some Instances of Persons, who from setting out with great Reluctance and Fearfulness in a course of Vice, have come to be Monsters in Wickedness; who have gone far in rooting out of their Hearts that Sense of Virtue and Modesty which is natural to Men, and whose Recovery is almost to be despaired of. So that the wisest Method which Men can take for governing their Hearts, is to resist the Beginnings of Vice, and the very first Tendency towards it in themselves, and to bear down every evil Inclination as soon as it is perceived, which may be done without any great difficulty. But if we have been so unhappy as to have suffered vicious Passions already to grow

SERM. grow upon us; the Remedy which is left to us

IV. in this case, is with great Resolution to oppose their farther Progress, and to do all we can to cross and break them; to avoid as much as is possible every Opportunity of gratifying them, to guard against all Temptations to comply with them, and if they take their rise from our bodily Constitutions, to withdraw those Recruits and Nourishments which are apt to inflame our Appetites, and to deny ourselves some external Gratifications, which in other Circumstances we might freely allow ourselves to partake of. And to make us more resolute and careful in this matter, it will be useful to impress upon our Minds a deep Sense of the great Calamities, to which we must be unavoidably exposed from a disorderly state of our Hearts, and our being enslaved to any vicious Affections. A lively Perception of our Misery and Danger on this account will be the most likely means to rouse us effectually, and to make us exert our utmost Abilities to reform our Hearts, and to get free from our Corruptions.

3. Lastly, To all the other Means which we make use of for *keeping our Hearts*, let us not neglect to add our earnest Prayers to God, that he who *giveth Wisdom liberally to all that ask it*, would teach us how to rule all  
our

Jam i. 5.



our Passions and Affections ; that he would **SERM.**  
 endow us with such a Portion of his Holy Spi- **IV.**  
 rit, which is promised under the Dispensation  
 of the Gospel, as will enable us in all Cases to  
 discern what is good, and bring all our inward  
 Sentiments and Dispositions into obedience to  
 the Law of our Minds and Consciences ; as  
 will make us *mortify the Deeds of the Body,*  
 and *walk in the Spirit,* and abound in all  
 his Fruits, which are in all *Goodness, Righte-* **Eph. v. 9.**  
*ousness and Truth.*

JOHN IV. 24.

God is a Spirit, and they that worship him  
 must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.

**SERMON**  
 HERE is hardly any Principle of  
 Religion which has been more uni-  
 versally acknowledged by Mankind,  
 than that God is to be worshipped : his rat-  
 ionality ; and yet in nothing have they  
 been more apt to run into Mistakes, than in  
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 offered to him, and the proper Methods of  
 expressing the Respect and Devotion of their  
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 Religion, some Rituals and Modes of divine Wor-  
 ship every where prevailing ; but if we should  
 enquire

# SERMON V.

## The Spiritual and true Worship of God.

JOHN IV. 24.

*God is a Spirit, and they that worship him,  
must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.*

**T**HERE is hardly any Principle of Religion which has been more universally acknowledged by Mankind, than that God is to be worshipped by his rational Creatures; and yet in nothing have they been more apt to run into Mistakes, than in their Notions of that Worship which is to be offered to him, and the proper Methods of expressing the Respect and Devotion of their Minds towards him. If we look into the various parts of the World, we shall find some Forms of Religion, some Rites and Modes of divine Worship every where prevailing; but if we should enquire

enquire into the Grounds and Reasons of these religious Forms and Rites, it would not be possible to fix upon any that could justify or recommend the far greater part of them to a wise Man; but they would almost all appear to be unworthy of that Being, for whose Honour they are said to have been instituted, and instead of doing good to the Persons who observe and use them, to have often a fatal Influence in corrupting their Hearts, and leading them to a great deal of Wickedness and Immorality in the course of their Lives. It is therefore a matter of great Necessity and Importance to correct the false Apprehensions of Men concerning Religion or the true Worship of God, and to give them just Notions with respect to this Point: Without this, there can be no such thing as a rational Piety exercised by them, nor will the Principles of their Religion be of any use to them in discharging the moral and social Duties of Life; but will very probably, on the contrary, undermine the Foundations of Honesty and Goodness, which are naturally laid in their Minds, and under the plausible Appearance of Devotion, reconcile them in some measure to Actions which are perfectly inconsistent with the Principles of all true Religion and Humanity.

†

Our



SERM.

Our Saviour, in the Words which I have

V. read, has given us, in general, an Account of

that Worship which is to be offered to the Deity, and has withal laid down the Foundation upon which it stands: And because a just Notion of the true Ground or Reason of that kind of Worship which is to be presented to the supreme Being, will lead us to a more easy and clear Conception of the thing itself, I shall begin with the Consideration of that, which is the spiritual Nature of God. *God is a Spirit*, says our Saviour, *and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.*

When our Saviour here tells us that *God is a Spirit*, he means, that he is a Being entirely separated from Matter or Body, and all its Properties and Affections; that he is a pure Mind, and possessed of the most excellent Powers and Perfections which belong to that kind of Beings. It is somewhat difficult, I believe, for Persons of low Understandings, who are unaccustomed to abstract Reflections, and who have taken in the greatest part of their Knowledge by the external Senses employed upon the gross Objects which are daily before them, to raise their Minds to an Apprehension of the Existence of immaterial

terial invisible Substances : But that there SERM.  
are really such Substances, particularly that V.  
the Supreme Being is such, is a thing that is  
capable of the clearest Proof, and will not be  
called in question by any who upon rational  
Grounds acknowledge the Existence of God.

It is not indeed in the power of the wisest  
and most knowing, to declare what the Na-  
ture of an immaterial Being, or of a Spirit is ;  
and as little can they tell what the Substance  
is of any common piece of Matter, which is  
every day seen and touched by them : But as  
notwithstanding our Unacquaintedness with  
the Essence of material Objects, we are not  
only sure of their Existence, but also know  
many of their Qualities and Properties ; so in  
like manner, though we are ignorant of the  
Nature of Spirits, yet from their undeniable  
Operations and Effects, we may both be con-  
vinced that such Beings exist, and have a no-  
tion of several of the Faculties and Proper-  
ties which belong to them. Not only the  
Existence, but many of the Attributes and  
Perfections of the infinite eternal Spirit, the  
Father of all other Spirits, and Fountain of  
all their Perfections, may be discerned in the  
various parts of the Universe which he has  
made, and which he still sustains and governs :  
But of all the Works of God which come

SERMON. any way within our Observation, that which will  
 V. best enable us to form just and true Thoughts  
 of the Powers and Properties of his Nature,  
 is the Soul or Spirit of Man, which is of a  
 quite different nature from the Body, and  
 is in a peculiar manner the Off-spring of God,  
 upon which he has impressed, in some pro-  
 portion, an Image of his own Excellencies.  
 Now when we reflect seriously upon our own  
 Minds, we perceive them to be the Sub-  
 ject of various Powers and Affections; the  
 chief of which are the Understanding, or a  
 Power of apprehending and knowing things;  
 a Sense of Good and Evil in the Affections  
 and Actions of rational Agents; and a Dispo-  
 sition of Benevolence, or an Inclination to  
 communicate Happiness. These are the  
 highest Faculties, and most noble Accom-  
 plishments which belong to our Minds; and  
 from a View of these Spiritual Perfections in  
 ourselves, we may arrive at some notion of  
 the Perfections of other Spirits, and even of  
 the infinite Divine Spirit himself. It must  
 however be always remembered by us, be-  
 fore we judge of the Perfections of the Di-  
 vine Mind from those that we perceive to  
 be in our own, that the highest Accomplish-  
 ments which belong to us, are at best but  
 very faint Resemblances of his infinite Ex-  
 cellencies,



cellencies, which contain every thing that is  
valuable and lovely in us in the most per-  
fect manner that can be, free of all Defects,  
and without a possibility of being blemished  
or corrupted by any opposite Qualities. So  
that we must separate from our Notions of  
the Divine Attributes and Properties, all those  
things, which however they may be account-  
ed Perfections and Virtues in us, do yet in  
reality argue the Imperfection of our Beings,  
and are only Consequences from the frail State  
of our Nature and our limited Faculties; and  
must substitute what is most perfect in our  
own Minds, as the Foundation upon which  
we judge of the Properties of the supreme  
Mind, and after that must allow for the in-  
finite Disproportion, as to the Degree and Mode  
of them, between his Perfections and ours.  
Thus then, when we ascribe Intelligence or  
Knowledge, which is one of the great Ex-  
cellencies of our Nature, to the Deity; this  
cannot be supposed to have any Affinity to  
that sort of Knowledge which is intromitted  
to our Minds by the external Organs; nor yet  
to that rational Knowledge which we obtain  
gradually, by the help of intermediate Ideas,  
and the slow and tedious Processes of the dis-  
cursive Faculty; but must be understood to be  
a clear, full, and immediate intuition of all

SERMON. things, which leaves no room for any Ignorance

V. or Deception, and which is not attended with the least Pain or Labour; of which the Knowledge that we have of what are called first Principles, or self-evident Truths, has some resemblance. In like manner, when we speak of a Sense of moral Goodness, or an Approbation of Virtue as a Property inherent in the Divine Mind; this must be conceived to be something infinitely more strong and lively than any thing that we have ever experienced in ourselves, to be an incorruptible and never-failing Fountain of all Purity and Holiness, which most freely and invariably determines the Deity to do every thing that is right, and secures him against a Possibility of the contrary; which gives him the highest Relish of his own Excellencies, and makes him take delight in the Virtue and good Conduct of his rational Creatures, and necessarily and indispensably to require from them a Purity of Heart and of Conversation; to which our Perception and Relish of Virtue, when it is found in any high degree in ourselves, and our Approbation of it in Persons of eminent and distinguished Characters, bear some Analogy. And so likewise, when we suppose a Disposition of Goodness, which is one of the greatest Ornaments of our  
Minds,

Minds, to be a Perfection of the Divine Mind; SERM.

V.



this must be considered as a Principle infinitely strong and diffusive, calm and steady, which is never to be exhausted, which is always exerting itself for producing the greatest and most extensive Happiness of the Creation, according to the Scope which the infinite Knowledge and unbounded Power of the Deity give it, without being at any time counteracted or limited by Caprice, Envy, Revenge, or by any of those more justifiable Affections, which too often interrupt the Exercise of our Benevolence, or too much contract it and render the Effects of it very insignificant; to which, however, the calm undisturbed Desires of the general Happiness of the World, which prevail in our Minds, in some of our best Tempers, are some way correspondent. Thus by considering what is most excellent in the Constitution of our own Spirits, and abstracting that from the Defects and Weaknesses of them, we may frame the justest Notion that we can have of the Properties of the supreme infinite Spirit, and know that he is a Being most intelligent and wise, of absolute Purity, and perfect Goodness; that he possesses these Perfections without all Allays, and acts steadily and uniformly under the Influence of them; that



SERM. he can do nothing but what these Principles  
 V direct him to, and approves of nothing in his  
 Creatures, but what is agreeable to the Holiness of his Nature, and the Ends of his Wisdom and Goodness in creating them.

Having thus considered what is to be understood by the spiritual Nature of God, which our Saviour lays as the Foundation of the Worship which is to be offered to him; I shall next consider the Account which he gives of that Worship itself, which is, that it is to be performed *in Spirit and in Truth*. To worship God *in Spirit*, is to worship him with the Mind and Heart, with the Understanding and Affections, with the several Powers and good Dispositions which are implanted in the Soul: More particularly, it is to have an inward Conviction and Belief of his Existence, an Esteem and Love of his Perfections, a grateful Sense of his Favours, Trust in his Providence, Obedience and Submission of Mind to his Will, and a Disposition to imitate his Nature, and to form ourselves according to the Example of his Purity, Equity and Goodness in our whole Conversation and Behaviour in the World. This is to worship God *in Spirit*,  
 in

in opposition to our rendering him a service merely external and bodily, consisting of empty Forms, of Observances and Ceremonies which have not any Life or Virtue in them. And to worship him in *Truth*, is to worship him with real and substantial Virtue, with those Dispositions and Actions which have an intrinsic and solid Goodness in them, which are naturally amiable and attractive of the Approbation and Love of Men, independently of positive Institution, and of Fancy, and all the particular Customs and Usages of the World: Such as Reverence, Gratitude, Love, and Submission to God, and the Exercise of Purity, Justice, and Charity towards Men, in obedience to the Will of God, and in conformity to his Example. This is the *true* Worship which God requires, and which is infinitely more valuable in his Estimation than all the pompous and costly Shews of Devotion, which so much affect the Imaginations of weak Men, which however have nothing of solid worth in them, and which for the most part are very improper Expressions of those Dispositions and Affections, which are the Life and Soul of all true Piety and Devotion.

SERM.

That this is the meaning of worshipping  
 V. God *in Spirit and in Truth*, is sufficiently  
 plain from the natural Force and common  
 Signification of these Phrases, and is besides  
 further evident from the Occasion and Design  
 of our Saviour's Words: He was here engaged  
 in a Conversation with a Woman of *Samarita*,  
 who having perceived from his Discourse that  
 he was a Prophet, immediately desired his  
 Opinion in the grand Question debated be-  
 tween the *Jews* and the *Samaritans*, concern-  
 ing the privileged Place of offering Sacrifice,  
 and celebrating the other parts of divine Wor-  
 ship; for which Circumstance the People of  
 both Nations expressed a much greater Zeal,  
 than for offering a rational and acceptable Wor-  
 ship to the Deity in the Places which they con-  
 secrated to his Service. To rectify therefore  
 the false Notions which they entertained in  
 this Point, our Saviour intimates to the Wo-  
 man, that though the *Jews* did indeed main-  
 tain the right side of the Question in debate,  
 yet the whole Matter of it was of a very trivi-  
 al nature, in comparifon of another thing  
 which was not at all attended to by them, the  
 true Nature of that Worship which is to be  
 presented to God. Both the *Jews* and the  
*Samaritans* were remarkable, for what in-  
 deed has been too much the common Weak-

ness



ness of Mankind, an excessive Fondness for a **SERM.**  
pompous and ceremonious Devotion, and the **V.**  
laying a mighty stress on the external Forms,  
Modes, and Circumstances of divine Worship;  
while they had no just Sense of that Religion  
which is seated in the Heart; consisting in pure  
Affections, in Innocence and Integrity of  
Mind; in Sobriety, Righteousness and Char-  
ity. This, however, our Lord declares, was  
the Worship of God that was chiefly to be re-  
garded by them, especially as the Dispen-  
sation of the Gospel was then opened, and the  
time was at hand when the whole Frame of  
the external ceremonious Service appointed to  
the *Jews* was to be removed; when Religion  
was to be restored to the original Simplicity of  
Nature, and to be encumbered with no Rites  
which have a tendency to distract or engross  
the Mind; when the Father of all things ex-  
pected, that all who pretend to worship him  
should render to him a reasonable and manly  
Service, in which their highest and most no-  
ble Faculties are to be employed, made up  
of something better than vain Notions, life-  
less Forms, and a Zeal about the Rituals and  
Circumstances of his Worship, even of a hear-  
ty Veneration and Love of him, of an en-  
tire Obedience and Subjection of Soul to his  
Will,

SERM. Will, and consequently of Purity, Truth,  
V. Justice, Charity, and every moral Virtue.

Now the Propriety of rendering this kind of Service to the Deity, will be easily perceived by any who reflect upon his Nature: He is a pure and perfect Spirit; he can therefore delight in no other than a spiritual Worship, nor will he receive any Homage at the hands of Men, but the sincere Devotion of the Soul, the Virtues and good Affections of a truly honest Heart. It would be most absurd, to suppose that the Almighty, who has nothing in him like the bodily Senses, the Imagination, and the Passions of Mankind, can ever be affected with the Objects, which by means of these lower and more imperfect parts of our Constitution, have so great an effect upon weak Mortals; such as Shews and Sounds, Processions and Prostrations, Penances and Austerities, Temples and Sacrifices, Complements and Applauses. These are things which at best he must think very meanly of, and which he must greatly despise and abhor, if presented to him by his Worshippers, as they too often are, as Equivalents for a virtuous Mind. Every wise and generously-minded Man, can see the Vanity and Folly of those external Solemnities in Religion, which are so much the Amusement of the Vulgar, without

without contributing any thing to their Improvement in true Piety and Virtue, and has an Esteem for nothing but the honest Dispositions and morally good Qualities of the Heart: How much more then will the Deity, who has an infinitely truer and more generous Sense of things than the wisest and best of Men, and has withal the greatest Goodness, disregard the vain and useless Services, by which unthinking Mortals fondly endeavour to please him, and value them only for offering him an uncorrupted and pure Mind, filled with all the Virtues which are intrinsically good, and which tend to their own Dignity and Happiness. These are the things which are adapted to his Nature, and agreeable to his Perfections, and which he always approves and relishes. These alone make up that Worship, which is worthy of his Acceptance.

I shall conclude with some Observations, which will properly arise upon this Subject.

1. We must here take notice, that it does not follow from any thing that has been said, that an external Worship is to be altogether neglected, or to be abolished by Mankind. This is a Caution which is necessary to be interposed, not only against the fond Conceits of some Enthusiasts, who pretending to be full of a pure spiritual Light, and feeling, as they



SERM. they fancy, a sublime rapturous Devotion in  
V. their Souls, have expressed a great Contempt  
for a Church, a Ministry, and Ordinances as  
very pitiful and beggarly things, far below the  
regard of any who aspire to the true Height  
and Perfection of Christianity; but likewise  
against the Opinion of others, who upon more  
sober and cool Principles declare against an ex-  
ternal Worship, who consider Religion as a  
divine Principle or Philosophy in the Mind,  
which is both to preserve a right Temper to-  
wards God, and to influence Men in perform-  
ing the Duties of an honest and social Life,  
and which is to be cultivated and improved by  
Reflection and Meditation, but is not to be  
expressed in any outward Forms of Devotion,  
or in any stated Acts of Worship; which, as  
they think, have almost always degenerated  
into Superstition, and are liable to great Abuse  
through the cunning of interested Men, to  
whom the Management of such matters is  
chiefly committed. This Scheme, how plau-  
sible soever it may look to some, is by no  
means adapted to the state of human Nature,  
nor calculated for the general Use and Benefit  
of Mankind: If it should be allowed, that  
Persons who are very contemplative and much  
conversant in divine and moral Subjects, may  
possibly find a constant Spring of Goodness  
in

in their own Thoughts and Reflections, without an Attachment to external Forms, and without practising what are commonly called the instrumental Duties of Piety, yet what is this to the Case of the Generality? The main Body of Men, certainly, stand in need of all the Helps that can be given them, both for forming in their Minds a true and adequate Notion of their Duty, and for engaging their Hearts and Wills to the love and practice of it; among which, Forms of Devotion, and positive Institutions of Religion, if wisely ordered and used, will probably have the greatest Efficacy; because these are naturally apt to fix the Impressions of Religion deep in the Mind, by engaging the whole Attention of Men, and bringing them under the most immediate and sensible Influence of the divine Presence and Perfections: And therefore we find there has hardly been any Religion in the World, not excepting those of divine Institution, which has not had some instrumental Duties, and some positive Rites annexed to it. Even the Christian Institution itself, notwithstanding the great Simplicity of it, requires us not only to offer Prayers and Thanksgivings both privately and publickly to Almighty God, but likewise to attend to certain Rites and Usages, which are plainly designed, and natu-

SERMON. rally fitted for raising the Minds, and strength-

V. ning the Affections of weak Men, in the  
 ~~~~~ contemplation and pursuit of Virtue, and  
 which, when observed according to the mani-
 fest and true Intention of them, have always
 a happy Influence to these purposes. If these
 things are turned into Superstition, let such an
 Abuse of them be removed, and Precautions
 taken against it for the future: If Men mis-
 take the Nature and Design of them, if they
 imagine that any Sanctity or Religion can con-
 sist in mere outward Acts, if they ascribe a
 greater Efficacy to these than the reason of
 things will allow of; if they do not consider
 external Duties to be instituted, not for the
 sake of Almighty God, who is not to be af-
 fected or moved by them, but for their own,
 as condescensions and helps to their Infirmit-
 ies, and as means to bring them more easily to the
 practice of moral Goodness; and if they do
 not, in the use of these means, endeavour to
 attain to that great End of Religion, let their
 Mistakes and Errors in these Points be fully
 exposed and corrected: But to abolish and
 take away entirely an external Worship, be-
 cause Religion may possibly, in some Instan-
 ces, subsist without it, and because it is liable
 to some Abuse, would be just as wise as to de-
 prive Men of the Use and Enjoyment of those

things which are generally necessary for the SERM.
Preservation and Support of Life, because some V.
few of stronger Constitutions can live without 
them, and because the things which are natu-
rally intended for the benefit of Life, are
often, through the Folly of Mankind, turned
to its destruction. It may be very well ex-
pected, that even those Persons, if any such
there are, who have always such a sublime
Notion, and such a generous Sense of Virtue
in their Minds, as is sufficient to keep them
true to the Cause, and steady in the practice
of it, without the aid of the instrumental
Duties of Religion, should, notwithstanding
their Superiority, have so much Consideration
of the Defects and Weaknesses of others, and
so much Compassion and Humanity towards
them, as to countenance and encourage by
their Example an Attendance upon the Duties
of external Worship, which is a thing very
evidently calculated for the general Good, and
actually attended with very beneficial Conse-
quences to a great part of Mankind.

2. From what has been said, we may see
the Inconsistency of a vain trifling Frame of
Mind, with an acceptable Performance of the
Duties of Devotion and Divine Worship. It
is an essential Qualification of the true Wor-
ship of God, that it be performed in *Spirit*
and

SERM. *and in Truth*, which must at the least imply

V. that the Mind and Heart are to be seriously and affectionately employed in it. What

then can be thought of that Worship of God, which consists merely in Men's resorting to the places set a-part for his Service, and, according to the Expressions of the Prophets,

Isa. xxix. in drawing near to them with their Lips, in

13.

Ezek. sitting before him as his People, and shewing

xxxiii. 31. much Love with their Mouths, while their

Hearts are at a distance from him, and perhaps their Countenance and Carriage shew them to be altogether inattentive and disaffected to what they pretend to be about.

This, surely, is not to worship God, but to affront and abuse him, and to express such Mockery and Contempt of him as would be accounted intolerable in any Man with respect to his Superiour in this World.

If there be ever occasion for Seriousness and Recollection of Mind, for Gravity and Decency of Behaviour, for Liveliness and Intenseness of Affection, it must certainly be, when we address ourselves to, and profess to worship the great God of Heaven and Earth, with whom it infinitely concerns us to deal sincerely, and who is every way worthy of our strongest and best Affections.

Ecclus.

xliii. 30.

When you glorify the Lord, says the Son of Syrach, exalt him as

much

much as you can ; for even yet will be far exceed : And when you exalt him, put forth all your Strength, and be not weary ; for you can never go far enough. I know that some Persons, by putting on an unnatural Solemnity, and by a strained Formality in the Exercise of their Devotion, have helped to bring all serious Appearances in the Worship of God into contempt ; but certainly a small degree of Discretion may restrain a Man from every thing that is really offensive on this hand, without running into the other Extreme of turning the serious Exercise of Piety and Religion into a Jest ; which, it is to be feared, is become too much a prevailing Humour and Fashion ; it seeming to be a piece of Form with many, to shew themselves, at certain times, in the Churches and Assemblies of Christians, who yet look upon it as a mean thing, and unbecoming their Characters, to join with any signs of inward Devotion in the Services which are performed there. This Practice, however it may appear to the Persons who are guilty of it, is really monstrous, and must be shocking to sober and considerate Men ; as it discovers a Mind not only void of some of the noblest Affections which belong to our Nature, but disposed to use a most bold and presumptuous Freedom, with the most

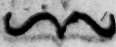
SERM. excellent and the greatest of all Beings, who

V. according to the most natural and obvious Dictates of Reason and Conscience, is to be treated by all Mankind, with all imaginable Reverence, Submission, and Humility.

3. We may observe how necessary and useful right Notions of the Nature of God are, in order to our offering a true and acceptable Worship to him. This Remark naturally arises from our Saviour's laying the Foundation of a rational and acceptable Devotion in a Consideration of the Spirituality of God, or in just Conceptions of him as a pure and perfect Mind: And certainly both our Reason and Experience may convince us, that a true way of thinking concerning him, as a Being far above all material Impressions, as possessing the highest spiritual Perfections, and as being constantly guided and governed by the Dictates of perfect Wisdom, Purity, and Goodness, must naturally lead us to serve and worship him with such Affections and Actions as are intrinsically worthy and good, with Reverence, Gratitude, and Love, with Obedience and Submission of Mind, with Integrity and Goodness in our whole Conversation: Whereas on the contrary, false Notions of God, the bringing him too much down in our Imaginations to a level with Mankind, the representing him under

under sensible Images, and the vesting him with the Weaknesses and Passions of the human Nature, have always a tendency to betray Men into a stupid Idolatry, or into a mean, timorous, and abject Superstition, which is for the most part attended with a great Corruption of Heart, and a weakning of all the Obligations both of Piety and Humanity. We need not go to the *Heathen* Nations for Instances to confirm the truth of this Observation; there are many undeniable Examples to this purpose, among those who have had the Advantages of revealed Religion. It is, therefore, of great moment to guard Men against all gross and low Conceptions of the Deity, and every thing that is apt to raise such Conceptions of him in them. For this reason, as well as for the Indignity which it offers to the divine Majesty, the use of Images in the Worship of God is strictly prohibited; for as the weak and unthinking part of Mankind, have been usually very fond of this, so it has never failed to beget in them dishonourable Thoughts of God, and to be a great means of cherishing and increasing their Superstition, and drawing them into the worst Consequences of it. The practice of the Church of *Rome*, therefore, is utterly inexcusable in this point, and that even supposing the Case to be no other,

SERM. than what some of the better or more politick
V. sort of them, ashamed of their gross Idolatry,
 pretend it to be; that Images are not used by
them as Objects of Worship, but only as hi-
storical Memorials, and Helps for heightning
the Piety and Devotion of the People: If
even this, I say, were all that could be ob-
jected to them, though it is by no means so,
it would yet be most absurd and intolerable;
because it must be exceedingly evident to every
one who is acquainted with the weak side
of human Nature, and has made any Obser-
vations upon Men, that the setting up of
Images in the Places of religious Worship,
and the obliging Men to perform their Devo-
tions before them, instead of instructing and
elevating the Mind, and raising any Senti-
ments of a rational Piety, will, on the contra-
ry, depress the Spirits of Men, and fill them
with gross Conceits and Fancies, that the Deity
is one like themselves, and to be gained by the
same Methods of Address, and the same sort
of Services and Submissions, by which the fa-
vour of frail and passionate Mortals is often ob-
tained; the consequence of which will be a
freakish and endless Superstition, which will
leave but little room for the Exercise of true
Piety and Virtue, and which will frequently
serve for an Atonement or Compensation for
the

the vilest Immoralities: This is the Effect SERM.
which may be expected even from that use of V.
Images in the celebration of Divine Worship, 
which the most modest and cautious Defen-
ders of them contend for, at least in the ge-
nerality of Men, who are prone to receive
bad Impressions from them, and can have
no Remedy from those Distinctions and Ab-
stractions, by which some Men of Specula-
tion pretend to secure themselves from the
ill Influence which such sensible Objects may
have upon them in the times of their De-
votion. The Truth of all which, may be
pretty clearly seen from the Event and Issue
to which things have been long ago reduced
in the Church of *Rome*; where, by means of
their Images, which were probably at first set
up in Churches, only as Emblems and histo-
rical Memorials, and some other things of the
same tendency, as gross an Idolatry and Su-
perstition, with all the fatal Effects of them,
are to be found, as were, perhaps, ever known
to be in the most ignorant and depraved parts
of the *Heathen* World.

4. Lastly, We may observe from the Ac-
count which has been given of the Nature of
Divine Worship, that it is not compleated by
the Exercise of those Affections which ter-
minate in God himself; but that besides this,

SERM. it comprehends a good moral Conduct, and

V. an honest Conversation towards Mankind.

There are some Persons who would very willingly make a Separation between Religion and Morality, and use the one for a Pretence of neglecting and destroying the other; who, if they perform what they call their Duty to God, imagine there is no great matter in it, if they fall short in the Respects that are due to Mankind, and who with an Appearance of a great deal of Piety and Zeal for the Divine Honour, contradict and violate the plainest Obligations of Justice and Humanity. There are many Instances of this Behaviour, not only in the case of open Persecution upon the account of Religion, but in the more common and private dealings of Mankind with one another. Now the Notion which leads Men into this Conduct, or which at least helps some of them to justify it in some measure to their own Minds, must appear to be nothing but a false enthusiastical Conceit, to any who considers that there can be no true Piety towards God, which is not productive of Righteousness and Charity to Men; that the Dispositions of Reverence, Love, and Gratitude which we exercise towards him, must naturally lead us to the Practice of all moral and social Virtues; which

which we cannot but know, if we reflect SERM.
at all, to be entirely agreeable to his Will, V.
and in pursuance of the wise and good Designs of his Creation, and Administration of the Affairs of Mankind. And this seems to be one Reason, why the Love of God is so strictly enjoined, and so great Stress is laid upon it in Religion; because, besides its being a most amiable Affection and most becoming our Nature, and its tending greatly to our Perfection and Happiness, it has a most powerful Influence in determining us to promote the Interest of Society and of Mankind, by a strict Observance of the Rules of Equity, Temperance, and Charity, in every part of our Conduct; which Virtues, when practised by us from a Principle of Reverence and Love to God, and in imitation of his Nature, are as truly and properly a part of his Worship, as the Exercise of any Affections of which he is the ultimate and sole Object. This is evident not only from the Notion which Reason gives us of the Worship of God, but also from the Accounts and Descriptions of it, which we meet with in many places of *Scripture*. I shall only take notice of two Passages, which are very direct and full to this purpose: The first is in *Micah* vi. 8. where we find this Answer returned to an

SERM. Inquiry which is made in the foregoing Ver-

V.

ses, concerning the true and acceptable Method of worshipping the Deity; *He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is Good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* The other Passage is in the

Epistle of St. James, chap. i. 27. where the Apostle gives us this Description of pure Religion, and the true Worship of the Father; *Pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the World.* In vain

therefore do any pretend to worship God, while they knowingly omit their Duty to Men: In vain is Religion pleaded, in prejudice to Morality; which is so far from being subverted by the Principles of Piety, that these, on the contrary, are a great Support and Security to it; and never attain their End, till they have made us thoroughly just and honest, sober and temperate, friendly and charitable in all our Conversation. Let us always then consider our pious Dispositions towards God, as intended for influencing and strengthening our honest and generous Affections towards Mankind, and freely suffer them to produce in us all the Fruits of Mercy,

Peace,

The spiritual and true Worship of God.

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Peace, and Righteousness. Thus shall we **SERM.**

truly honour and worship God, and offer him **V.**
the Sacrifices, with which he is well pleased.

To him may all Praise be given, both now
and for ever. *Amen.*

The external Duties of Religious
Worship, and positive Rites of
Christianity.

Not forgetting the assistance of our
graces, as the means of grace is; and
having a cheerful

SERMON
I. It is the matter of sorrow every one
Observation, that when we very apt to
run into Extremes; that not only dif-
ferent Men do so, but that the same Men at
different times, have various Follies and
Aversions to the very same things; many In-
stances of which may be seen in their Con-
duct, not only in regard to trifling Affairs, but
in great and Affairs of little consequence, but
with respect to Matters of the most serious
Concern and greatest importance to them;
but

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[154]
Power, and Righteousness. Thus shall we serve
V.
The external Duties of Religious
Worship, and positive Rites of
Christianity.

HEB. X. 25.

Not forsaking the Assembling of ourselves together, as the Manner of some is; but exhorting one another.

IT is the matter of almost every one's Observation, that Men are very apt to run into Extremes; that not only different Men do so, but that the same Men, at different times, have violent Fondnesses and Aversions to the very same things; many Instances of which may be seen in their Conduct, not only in regard to trifling Amusements and Affairs of little consequence, but with respect to Matters of the most serious Concern and greatest Importance to them:
But

But that we may confine ourselves to one **SERMON.**
Instance, relating to that, which is to be the **VI.**
Subject of the present Discourse; while a
great number of those who make profession
of Religion have so high an Opinion of the
Duties of Devotion, and the external Acts of
Divine Worship, and lay out so much of
their Time and Zeal about them, as to show
themselves to be no better than Enthusiasts
in the Notions which they entertain of them,
and grossly superstitious in the Use which they
make of them; there are, on the other hand,
many others, some of whom are not to be
thought void of a true Sense of Religion,
who set no great Value upon these things;
who consider them to be always capable of
great Abuse and Corruption, and frequently
productive of a great deal of Harm, and
to be at best but weak and childish Amuse-
ments, little deserving the regard of a wise
Man, who can offer to God a more manly
and reasonable Service, a *pure Heart and a*
virtuous Life; which, they say, after all the
Zeal that has been expressed for other matters,
are the only things which are of real Worth
and Importance: Nay, of those who have
been some time most remarkable for their
zealous and punctual Attendance on the out-
ward Forms and Rites of religious Worship,
there

SERM. there are several who have quite altered their

VI. Conduct; who, from a superstitious Strictness and Scrupulosity in these Points, have fallen into an entire Neglect of all positive Duties and instituted Methods of worshipping God; who have conceived such a Horror of their former Delusions, and the evil Consequences of them, that they resolve to keep at the utmost distance from what was the Occasion of drawing them into these Delusions; and so throw off all regard to a publick Worship, and the instrumental Duties of Religion, imagining that they can sufficiently acquit themselves of their Duty, by maintaining an inward Veneration and Love of the Deity, by acting as honest and useful Members of Society, and performing the Duties of the several Relations in which Providence has placed them in the World.

Thus many despise and neglect the Duties of an external Worship, because they have been unhappily perverted and abused; while others, from a wretched Insensibility and Unconcernedness in all Matters of Religion, are altogether indifferent and careless about them, as well as about things of greater value and importance. But from whatsoever Cause the Negligence of Men in this matter may proceed, it is certainly a thing of very evil tendency,

tendency, and most plainly inconsistent with **SERM.**
our Duty as Christians; which I shall endeavour to make appear, by considering, **VI.**

I. What the Appointment of Christianity is with respect to an external Worship.

II. The wise and good Ends which will be served by this Appointment, when it is duly observed.

First, I shall consider what the Appointment of Christianity is with respect to an external Worship. The Christian Religion is certainly an Institution of great Plainness and Simplicity; which is far from abounding with external Observances and positive Rites, which prescribes a rational and spiritual Worship of God, and always lays the greatest stress upon the Integrity and Virtue of the Mind, and makes no account at all of any outward Performances, how plausible and splendid soever they may be, when separated from inward Piety and Goodness. But notwithstanding all this, we shall very much mistake the matter, if we imagine Christianity to be so very refined and spiritual a thing, as to have no outward Acts of Worship, and no instituted Rites and Duties belonging to it: Something of this kind has made a part of every Religion

SERMON **VII** **W** **~** gion that has been known in the World, and seems to be altogether necessary for adapting a religious Institution to the general Use and Practice of Mankind.

For understanding what the particular Duties and Rites of external Worship prescribed by Christianity are, we must consider that some Duties of this sort are of such evident and universal Necessity, and of such great and publick Use, that they have had a place in every Scheme of Religion, that, with any appearance of Reason, has been proposed for the common Service and Benefit of Men: such as a solemn Invocation of the Deity by Prayer, the Celebration of his Praises and returning him Thanks for his Mercies, an inquiry into his Will, and the instructing and assisting Men in the practice of it. There seems to be a Propensity in Human Nature to some of these Duties, antecedently to the Consideration of their beneficial Tendency; and they are all such as the common Light of Reason has always recommended as most proper and effectual Means of Religion; as things which should be practised both privately and publickly by Men, for preserving and cherishing a just and lively Impression of God in their Minds, and giving this its proper Power and Influence over their Actions. Our

Saviour therefore has adopted these Duties in his Institution, and has confirmed and strengthened the Obligations which Men were under to attend to them by his own Authority, requiring his Disciples to offer Prayers and Thanksgivings to God, not only privately and separately, but openly, and in Communion with one another, to meet together for a publick and solemn Performance of these Duties of Divine Worship, and for *provoke*ing one another to Love and Good Works, giving them great Encouragements and Advantages for doing this, by promising his own Presence in the Assemblies which they hold for these purposes, by describing the Qualifications with which their Devotions should be presented to God, and assuring them of his Acceptance in the serious Exercise of them; and by laying down a perfect Pattern for directing and governing both their private and social Prayers. And besides these Duties of external Worship, which are Appendages of natural Religion, and may be considered as instrumental Duties of it, as well as of Christianity, our Saviour has required the Observation of two positive Rites, commonly known by the Name of the *Sacraments*; which are very easy and simple Ceremonies, the one consisting in washing the Body with Water, in

the

SERMON the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of

VI. the Holy Ghost, for initiating us solemnly into a Profession of the Christian Faith, and obliging us to a strict Performance of all the Duties belonging to that holy Profession; and the other consisting in our eating Bread and drinking Wine, in remembrance of the Sufferings and Death of our Saviour, and as a Token of our Union with him the Head, and with all our Fellow-Christians the Members of his spiritual Body.

These are the outward Duties and Rites which our Saviour has commanded his Followers to practise and observe in the Celebration of Divine Worship*: And accordingly we find that these were things which Men in the early Times of Christianity were very

* I know that some may think that Baptism, partaking of the Lord's Supper, and the instructing Men in the Principles and Duties of Religion, are improperly represented as Acts of divine Worship. And according to the strict Notion of religious Worship, this is very true. But as these are Duties to be attended to in obedience to the Will of God, and designed to raise a Temper of Piety, or those Affections which are most properly religious; they may, in a general Sense, be considered, as they commonly are, as parts of the religious Worship required by Christianity. Which, I hope, may justify the speaking of them, in several places of this Discourse, as Duties of the Christian Worship, though, in other places, they are distinguished from them.

very intent on. The account which we have SERM.
of the Apostles and other Disciples of our VI.
Lord, who, immediately after his Ascension, }
waited at *Jerusalem*, for the Accomplish-
ment of his Promise concerning the Gifts of
the *Spirit*, is, that they *continued with one* Acts i. 14.
Accord in Prayer and Supplication; and when
by the miraculous Descent of the *Holy Ghost*,
and the preaching of *St. Peter* in a few Days
afterwards, three thousand new Converts were
added to their Number, and admitted into
their Society, by the initiating Ceremony of
Baptism, we are told concerning them all,
that they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Acts ii.
Doctrine, and Fellowship, and in breaking 42.
of Bread, and in Prayers: They all together
made one Church or religious Society; they
lived together in one visible external Com-
munion, hearkning to the Instructions of the
Apostles, partaking of the Lord's Supper,
and offering their common Praises and Prayers
to God. And agreeably to the Pattern of
this primitive Church, many others, as the
Number of Christians daily increased, were
soon formed and modelled; in every one of
which a publick Worship of God was so-
lemnized in the Duties of Adoration, Prayer,
and Thanksgiving; the Principles and Doc-
trines of Christianity were explained and incul-
cated, Baptism was administered to Prose-

SERM. lytes, and the Lord's Supper was celebrated

VI. by the whole Body of Christian Professors. These are Facts sufficiently clear and certain from the History of the *Acts* and the *Epistles* of the New Testament, to say nothing of any other Authorities; in which we find that the Apostles, wherever they had any Success in propagating the Knowledge of Christianity, founded a Church, or formed their Converts into a Body or Society, for rendering a publick Homage to God, and for instructing and edifying one another; that the Members of each of these Churches kept up a visible Communion with the Members of other Churches as they had Opportunity, and had a stated Communion among themselves, in the several Duties and Rites of the Christian Worship; and that, to carry on a publick Worship among them with greater Regularity and Effect, some Persons were set apart for the Purpose of presiding in their religious Assemblies, for directing and assisting the rest in the outward Exercises of their Devotion, and informing them in every part of their Duty, and exciting them to the Practice of it.

And that there is nothing in all this that was any way peculiar to the first times of the Gospel, nothing but what should be observed and practised by Christians in all Ages,

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is plain, because neither the Nature of these SERM. external Duties of religious Worship, which VI. were practised by the primitive Christians, nor the Directions of our Saviour concerning them, confine them to one time more than another; because most of them have a Foundation in Reason, independently of the Commandment of our Lord, and should always be attended to on account of their apparent good Tendency, and natural Aptitude for promoting the great Ends of Religion; and because the two Rites which depend purely upon the positive Will and Appointment of the Institutor, are declared to be standing Institutions in the Church; our Saviour having promised his Disciples to be with them in the use of one of these Rites *to the End of the World*; and St. Paul having told us concerning the other, that the Death of our Lord is to be commemorated in it, *till his second Coming*.

Math.
xxviii. 19,
20.
1 Cor. xi.
26.

As for the Forms and Modes, the Places and Times of performing and celebrating the external Duties and Rites of the Christian Worship, there is hardly any thing particularly commanded. In the *Jewish* Religion these Circumstances were all limited and fixed by special Laws; but under the Liberty of Christianity they are left as mat-

SERM. ters of Indifferency, which may be diversified
 VI. according to the various Notions and Tem-
 pers of Men, and are to be determined by
 every particular Church, consulting what will
 be most effectual for promoting common Or-
 der and Peace, and for *edifying the Body of*
Christ in Love. Only as to a certain Pro-
 portion of Time, which is in general to be
 set apart for the Exercises of Religion and
 the Worship of God: As we are told in the
 sacred History, that God from the Begin-
 ning consecrated one Day in seven to these
 Employments; as the same Institution was
 renewed to the People of *Israel* in the Law
 of the Sabbath; as this is a very fit Pro-
 portion of Time to be dedicated to the Uses
 of Religion, as it neither encroaches too much
 on the necessary Business and Commerce of
 Life, nor leaves too great Intervals for the
 Impressions of Religion to wear away; as
 the Apostles and first Christians religiously
 observed one day in the weekly Revolution,
 though not the same in order that was ob-
 served under the *Jewish* Dispensation; as it
 was their constant Custom from the time
 of our Saviour's Resurrection, and in honour
 of it, to appropriate the first Day of the
 Week to the Purposes of a publick and so-
 cial Worship of God, and as this is charac-
 terised by one of the Apostles themselves as a
 Day

Day of Note and Distinction among them; SERM.
from all these Considerations, we may pret- VI.
ty strongly infer that one Day in every Week
is to be separated by us from the common
Occupations and Amusements of Life, and
to be devoted in a more peculiar manner
than the rest of our time to the Duties of
Divine Worship, to the Instruction and Im-
provement of ourselves and others in the
Knowledge and Practice of Religion, and to
such Acts of Christian Charity and Friend-
ship as are the best Indications, and most
proper Fruits of a truly pious Temper and
Disposition; and that we are bound to apply
particularly the first Day of the Week to
these Ends, so far, at least, as the Practice
and Example of the Apostles and most early
Christians can lay an Obligation upon us to
do so.

II. I shall now consider what wise and good
Ends will be served by the Appointment of
Christianity with respect to an external Wor-
ship, when it is duly observed.

It is a great Excellency and Advantage
of the Christian Religion, that the external
Duties and positive Rites of it are not only
simple and few, but of a plain Use and Sig-
nification; that we are not at a loss about
the reasons of their Institution, which is the

SERM. Case as to many of the *Jewish* Rites, and

VI. which must have made the Observation of them very tedious and burthensome; but that we can easily see that they are wisely designed, and capable, if duly attended to, of promoting the most important and excellent Purposes.

I. One great End which is served by them, is the Preservation of the Knowledge and Profession of Christianity in the World. Without the Assistance of external Institutions and Forms, it would have been impossible for the Christian Religion to have subsisted for any considerable time, and in any large Extent, among Men: The Miracles that were performed by our Lord and his Apostles, would perhaps have been sufficient for introducing it, and supporting it in the Age in which they were done; but when these Miracles had ceased, the Gospel would very soon have been upon the Decline, and must in succeeding times have made but a slow and small Progress, when no Methods were instituted or used for propagating it, that were in any sort proportioned to the Circumstances and Capacities of the main Body of Mankind. We cannot imagine that the Doctrine of our Saviour, whatever Confirmation he might originally have given it, would have had a much better Fate than the
Doctrine

Doctrines of the Philosophers, if, like that, it had been only a System of speculative Principles, and purely moral Precepts: In this Case, it might have been always known to a few curious and inquisitive Men, while all the rest of the World about them would have been almost entirely ignorant of it, and many not so much as acquainted with the Name of its Author. It is certain that the generality of the World have, usually, but little Leisure, and less Inclination, to acquire any great Knowledge of ancient Books and Writings, however valuable and important, in the way of study and research into them; but if they get any considerable Acquaintance with them, they must get it chiefly by the assistance of living Instructors, and by such Methods and Forms, as will without much Trouble insinuate the Notions contained in them into their Minds. The external Institutions of Christianity therefore, must be of the greatest use for preserving and propagating the Knowledge of it, as one of them is designed for instructing Men in the Doctrines of the Gospel, and all of them are apt, as often as they are used, to recall the Principles of it, and to make them familiar to the Mind: So that they are Methods of propagating Christianity that are suited to the Capacity and Situation of the meanest Persons; and if any thing will be ef-

S E R M.

VI.

SERM. *fectual* for diffusing the Knowledge of it
 VI. among all sorts and orders of Men, these Institutions will. And in fact to them it is owing, that great numbers of the lowest rank of Mankind, among whom the Notions of Philosophy could never make any progress, have always had a tolerable understanding of the Principles and Doctrines of the Gospel. And as these Institutions have hitherto been effectual for preserving the Knowledge and supporting the Profession of the Christian Religion, so it is not to be doubted but that under the Influence of Divine Providence they will be the means of conveying and transmitting it to all succeeding Generations.

2. Another most valuable End that will be obtained by a due Attendance on the external Institutions of the Christian Worship, is the fixing a deep and strong Impression of the Doctrines of the Gospel, and the Principles of Virtue in the Minds of Men. These Institutions will not only furnish us with speculative Notions of the Doctrines of Christianity, but will raise and enliven our Perceptions of them, will make them enter far into the Mind, and take a thorough Possession of it; and will consequently give them the greatest Influence for engaging us to the practice of Piety and Virtue. This therefore is a matter of

great

great moment. Every one may know that SERM.
VI.
the Perception even of the most important

Truths, if cold and unanimated, will have but little or no force upon the Hearts and Lives of Men; that we must dwell on the Consideration of them, fully imbibe and digest them, and have them habitually in our Thoughts, before they will be sufficient for governing our Affections, and become the Seeds and Principles of an uniform good Conduct in us. And though a few retired contemplative Men may perhaps be able, by their own Reflections, without confining themselves to particular Institutions and Forms, to preserve in their Minds such a quick and strong Sense of the great Principles and Obligations of Religion and moral Virtue, as will be a constant Flame of Devotion in their Hearts, and habitually influence them to an honest and worthy Behaviour; yet the greatest part of Mankind, by no means have it in their power to do this. It is plain indeed, that Men are not made or designed for a contemplative, so much as an active Life; neither their natural Passions, nor their Situation in this World will permit them generally to pursue the former: For some few, who, by a wise Disposition of Providence, have always a turn towards Contemplation, there is an infinitely greater number, in whom it is
never

SERM. never to be expected, at least in the degree that

VI. would be necessary to enable them, without
any foreign Direction and Assistance, to acquire
just and comprehensive Notions of their Duty,
and to maintain a lively and affectionate Im-
pression of it in their Hearts. So that if the
generality of Men are ever brought to a true
and full Sense of the Principles of Piety and
Virtue, and come to live under the Power of
them, it must be by Methods which will
check the natural Levity of their Minds, and
put a stop at proper Seasons to the hurry of
their worldly Affairs; which will elevate and
animate their Thoughts, and fix their Atten-
tion on morally good Objects; which will en-
gage them in a course of serious Reflections,
and give these the freest Entrance into their
Minds. And it is evident that the external
Institutions and Rites of Christianity are ex-
tremely well adapted to the promoting of
these Ends: For what can be more proper to
compose and elevate the Minds of Men, to fix
them on the noblest Objects, and to make
the most serious Impressions on them, than
solemn Addresses to the Deity, which bring
them under the most immediate Influence of
his Presence; and engage them in the most at-
tentive Consideration of his Nature and Per-
fections? What can be better calculated for
supplying

SERM.
VI.


supplying Men, naturally inconsiderate, and too apt to be diverted from all serious Thoughts, by the Pleasures and Cares of Life, with matter of good Reflection, and giving them a taste for spiritual and divine things; than the obliging them, at stated times, to suspend their worldly Pursuits, and to apply themselves to the Exercises of Devotion, and to Meditations on divine Subjects, to receive Instructions in the Doctrines of the Gospel, and to have the several Motives of it earnestly and affectionately pressed home upon them? What will lay good Principles deeper in the Heart, and give them a fuller possession of it, than our taking upon us the Profession of the Christian Religion, and obliging ourselves to the several Duties which it requires by a solemn and significant Rite? And what can be more apt to inspire us with the most noble Sentiments, with the most generous and divine Affections, than the commemorating the Passion and Death of our Saviour, by another expressive Ceremony? Certainly, if our Nature is at all susceptible of generous Impressions, we cannot but be tenderly and deeply affected with the inestimable Goodness both of Almighty God, and of our Blessed Lord, which is thus exhibited to our Consideration, and must feel the most ardent Gratitude and Love to-

SERM. wards them prevailing in our Hearts, disposing and constraining us to dedicate and resign ourselves most chearfully and entirely to their Service and Obedience. We may appeal to the Reason of every ingenuous Man, whether these things have not the plainest tendency to strengthen and improve good Principles, and to form a Temper of solid Piety and Virtue in all who carefully attend to them ; and whether it be indeed possible for a Man long to attend to them with Judgment and Affection, without finding himself much improved in this Temper by them ? We may farther appeal to the Experience of the World, whether they are not always the means of maintaining a Sense of Religion, and of moral Obligations, in a much stronger Degree than could otherwise be expected, in great Multitudes of Men ? Whether many professed Christians of mean Capacities, and a low Situation in Life, are not, by means of the external Institutions of the Gospel, evidently raised up to a degree of Wisdom and Virtue, which they must necessarily fall short of without them ? And whether even Men of the most refined Understandings, and the most generous Natures, by the same means, do not always receive a new and noble relish of divine Matters ; whether they are not thereby farther established in
Virtue,

Virtue, and have all the Pleasures of it raised SERM.
and heightned in them? This will be very VI.
plain to all who have any Knowledge of hu-
man Nature, and have observed what the
things are that form the Tempers, and influ-
ence the Conduct of Men: So that the exter-
nal Institutions of Christianity are not only
calculated for giving Men lively Impressions
of Religion, and improving them in the prac-
tice of it, but actually produce these Effects
in some considerable degree, among a great
part of Mankind.

3. Another good Purpose which will be
served by an Attendance on the external Insti-
tutions and Rites of the Gospel, is the promo-
ting of a mutual Esteem, Friendship, and
Love among Christians. This may be ex-
pected as a Consequence from our Attendance
on the external Duties and Rites of religious
Worship prescribed by Christianity, upon a
better Foundation than the mere Propensity of
Men to be more closely attached to those, whom
they consider as of a Party, or particular De-
nomination with themselves. For by having
all the same Liberty of Access to the Throne
of supreme Glory, and offering our common
Devotions to the *one God and Father of all,*
in the name of the one Lord and Mediator be-
tween God and Men, we must see that we
are

SERM. are all equally related to God as his Children,
 VI. and stand upon one common Foundation for
 recommending ourselves to his Favour; and
 by partaking all of *one Baptism*, we are not
 only all engaged in the same holy Profession,
 but upon making good our Engagement,
 are all entitled to the same *blessed Hope* of Sal-
 vation; and by eating all *one Bread*, in the
 Lord's Supper, we acknowledge ourselves with
 our Fellow-Christians to be all *one Body*, u-
 nited under *Christ* the common Head. From
 whence we may very naturally conclude, that
 we are to have the sincerest Esteem for all our
 Brethren, and that a Spirit of mutual Love is
 to animate the whole Society of Christians;
 that all who are really Members of the Body
 of *Christ*, are to be dear to one another, on
 account of those spiritual and high Relations
 which they have in common to Almighty
 God, and to our Blessed Saviour, and those
 good Qualities which entitle them all to the
 divine Favour; that the weakest and meanest
 of them are not to be despised on account of
 their humble Condition, nor the greatest to
 be envied for their superiour Abilities and Ad-
 vantages; that those of them who are most
 highly dignified in this World, should be al-
 ways ready to stoop to the lowest Acts of
 Humility and Condescension for the good of
 an

an afflicted Brother, and that all should rejoice SERM.
in one another's Happiness, and take every VI.
Opportunity of promoting it. ~

I proceed to draw two or three Inferences from what has been discoursed, with which I shall conclude.

It follows very plainly from what has been said, that the Neglect or Omission of the Duties of external Worship, enjoined by Christianity, is very criminal and inexcusable in all who profess to believe the Gospel. Tho' we saw no use or end of these Duties, and had no reason to persuade us to observe them, but a mere Declaration of the Will of God, that we should do so; yet, this surely would be a sufficient Foundation for our attending to them, and we could not shew a Carelessness or Indifference about them, without being guilty of unpardonable Presumption, and a Failure in the Submission which we naturally owe to the great Lord and Governor of all things. But when we find that these Duties are not only required by the positive Will of God, but besides that they are of the greatest Use for supporting the Profession of Christianity in the World, for fixing a lively Sense of the Doctrines and Principles of it in our Minds, for animating us with a noble Ardour in the practice of Virtue, and for uniting us in Love to
one

SERM.

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one another, what must be thought of the Neglect of them? Is it not most evidently a bad thing, as it argues not only a want of Respect to the Deity, but a Defect in every generous Principle, and a stupid unconcernedness about the things which are of the utmost importance for promoting the Dignity and Happiness of Mankind? In vain would any plead in excuse of this Neglect, that they are so much employed about the Virtues which are the End of Religion, that they have no time to attend to the things that are only the Instruments and Means of it; for this never has been, nor ever will be the Situation of any Persons upon Earth: And as little will they be able to excuse it, by pretending that they are Christians of so high a Form as to be above the use of the instrumental Duties of the Gospel, or that that they have already arrived at such a perfect Habit of Virtue, as not to stand in need of those Helps which may be wanted by others for maintaining a just Impression of the Obligations of Religion in their Minds, and supporting and setting them forward in the practice of it. For besides that it is hardly possible for a Man to speak in this manner concerning himself, without being charged with Pride and Arrogance, the Supposition upon which this Excuse depends, is not to be made;

of two. I of an opinion is 2 that

that Men may attain to such Perfection in Religion in this World, as not to be capable of receiving any new Improvements from an Attendance on the external Institutions of the Gospel; this, I say, is by no means true: SERM.
VI.

The most elevated Beings in the Universe, if we except only the Supreme Being himself, are probably always in a progress towards a state of higher Perfection. It is very certain, that the Men who have attained to the greatest measures of Wisdom and Virtue in this Life, are still capable of growing wiser and better; and it is as certain that a serious Attendance on the external Institutions of Christianity, will be at least as effectual for their Improvement, as any occasional Meditations and Reflections of their own, or any other means that they can use, will be. But, if it should be admitted that some very extraordinary Persons might be dispensed with from attending to the Duties of external Worship, so far as their own Improvement depends on that; yet surely the setting a good Example in this particular to Persons of lower Abilities and Attainments, must be a matter of some importance to them: It may very well be expected, that the Men whom we now speak of, should be always ready, from pure Humanity, and a regard to the Propagation of that

Vol. I. N Virtue,

SERM. Virtue, of which they are supposed to have

VI.

such a noble Sense in their Minds, to encourage by their own practice an Attendance on the instrumental Duties of Religion, which is very necessary for the Instruction and Improvement of the generality of Men, and is always of some use to a considerable part of them. But alas! how few can be supposed any way capable of preserving and proceeding in an uniform course of moral Goodness, without the assistance of the external Institutions and instrumental Duties of Religion? This, if it be a thing possible for any Men, requires such extraordinary Talents and Qualifications, as never fall to the share of any large number: And indeed, if we will look into the Actions of those, who are pleased to express a Contempt for the external Duties and Forms of Religious Worship, and live in the utter Neglect of them; who imagine themselves full of such a high Admiration and Love of Virtue, as is sufficient of itself to secure their Perseverance in a good course; I am afraid that the Conduct of many of them will be found very disproportionable to such high Pretensions; and that with all their fine Theories about the Excellence and Importance of moral Virtue, and all the Zeal which they would appear to have for it, they

they will be judged to transgress the Rules of S E R M.
it, in many plain Instances, and to fall into VI.
such gross Acts of Vice, as the Men who cul-
tivate a serious Sense of Devotion, and accus-
tom themselves regularly and discreetly to the
exercise of it, are hardly to be ever charged
with.

2. Let us guard against all enthusiastical
and superstitious Abuses of the external Duties
and Rites of the Christian Worship. This is a
thing very necessary both for our receiving the
Improvement which may be obtained from
an Attendance on these Duties and Rites, and
for removing the Prejudices which many have
conceived against them, and recommending
them to the more general Observation and
Use of the World. When we mistake the na-
ture and design of these Duties and Rites,
when we foolishly imagine that there is a Vir-
tue in the bare outward Acts, or perhaps that
there is something more spiritual and divine in
them than in any other Duties of Religion;
when we address ourselves to them with a
particular Dread and Awe in our Minds, and
are more scrupulous and punctual about every
little Circumstance and Formality in our De-
votions, than we are about the practice of mo-
ral Virtue itself; when we place our Religion
chiefly in devotional Exercises, or when we

SER M. substitute these in the room of moral Goodness,

VI. and offer them to God as a Composition for a virtuous Life: When we think and act thus with respect to the external Duties of religious Worship; as we grossly pervert them, so we not only prevent their having any good effects on us, but render them Instruments of great Evils to ourselves; as they divert our Attention from the things on which it should be chiefly fixed, and fill us with a fond Hope that we are entitled to all the Benefits promised in the Gospel, though we do not perform the principal and most important Duties of it; while at the same time we must naturally give rash and unwary Minds, who will not distinguish between the proper Design and the accidental Abuses of things, no just Objections indeed, but Disgusts and Aversions, which may have all the Effects of the justest Objections to these Duties of external Worship, when they see them to be so unduely magnified to the diminution and prejudice of matters of greatly superiour Worth and Consequence. So that if we would either render these Duties profitable to ourselves, or recommend them to the Observation of others, it is very necessary to guard against those Perversions of them, which some Men of a warm Imagination, or a superstitious Temper, are apt to

run

run into. And this we shall best do, by con-
sidering them in their proper Light, of being
Instruments or Means of forming a good Habit
of Mind in us, and engaging us to a virtuous
course of Life; that therefore there can be no
Sanctity in the external Performances them-
selves, but that the whole Merit of them is
derived from their being Acts of Obedience to
the Will of God, and their Subserviency in
promoting moral Goodness; that they are al-
ways to be kept in a due subordination to this
great End of Religion, which is a thing that
has an Intrinsic and immediate Worth in it,
and is of necessary and perpetual Obligation,
prior to all Consideration of its Tendency and
Consequences, and independently of all positive
Commands: so that whenever moral Virtues
and instrumental or positive Duties happen to
interfere, the latter must always give way to
the former; and in our Attendance on instru-
mental Duties and positive Rites, we must
still aim at improving ourselves in morally
good Qualities, and never think that we have
made the proper use of them, till we have
found their Efficacy for restraining us from
Vice and Wickedness, and making us *holy in*
all manner of Conversation. This Notion,
which both Reason and Scripture suggest to
us, about the Use and Subordination of the

SERM.
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SER M. external Duties and Rites of Devotion, if well

VI. fixed in our Minds, will be the best Preservative against those Corruptions of them, which have often rendered them not only vain and insignificant, but very hurtful and pernicious to Men; and have afforded the most plausible Pretence, to those who have wanted such a thing, for neglecting and disregarding them; and will prepare us for such a rational Attendance on them, as may both have a happy Effect upon ourselves, and remove the Prejudices of others against them, and give them a just Impression of their wise Design and beneficial Tendency.

3. Let us always attend to the external Duties of the Christian Worship, with an inward Seriousness and Devotion of Mind. This is a Qualification absolutely necessary for rendering our Performance of these Duties acceptable to God, and deriving any Benefit from it to ourselves. For notwithstanding the natural Aptitude of the instrumental Duties of the Gospel, to inspire good Sentiments, and to raise pious and virtuous Affections in us, the efficacy of them, as of all the other means which God employs for our Reformation, will certainly depend upon our own Disposition to make a right Use and Improvement of them. If we content ourselves with draw-

ing

ing near to God with our Mouths, while our S. A. R. M.  
 Hearts are far from him; if we engage in VI.  
 the Duties of his Worship with a trifling and   
 careless Temper of Mind, without any suitable  
 Affections towards him, and without any  
 Sense of what we are about; if we perform  
 them only from Custom; the most splendid  
 Acts of our Devotion will be but dead Forms,  
 a mere bodily Exercise, which will have no  
 Virtue to recommend us to God, or to pro-  
 duce any good Effect in us at all: Nay, so far  
 will the specious Expressions of Devotion,  
 in which the Heart has no Concern, be from  
 honouring and pleasing God, that he will ra-  
 ther deem them to be an impious Mockery  
 and Contempt of him; and so far will a mere  
 customary Performance of the external Duties  
 of Piety be from contributing to our Establish-  
 ment and Improvement in Virtue, that it will  
 be the means of hardening our Hearts, and  
 rendering us insensible to the most powerful  
 Impressions and Motives of Religion. So that  
 it very much concerns us to bring a serious  
 and attentive Mind to our Devotions; to pray  
 and give Thanks to God with earnestness and  
 warmth of Affection, to read the Holy Scrip-  
 tures and meditate upon them, and to attend  
 to the several Institutions of the Gospel, with  
 a sincere Intention of being farther informed

SERMON. and improved in our Duty by them; to take

VI. care that not only the inward Frame of our Spirits, but that our outward Appearance be grave and composed, while we profess to be employed in the Duties of divine Worship; to shew no Signs of Levity in our Countenances, or in any part of our Behaviour, and to order all our bodily Motions and Postures in the way that will be most likely to fix and raise our Minds. Thus may we hope that God will accept the spiritual Sacrifices which we present to him, and that we shall find the good Influence of our devotional Duties for our Instruction and Edification in Religion, or for making us, as St. Peter speaks, to grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom be Glory both now and for ever. Amen.

2 Pet. iii.  
18.

SERMON



# SERMON VII.

The Nature of Faith, Hope, and  
Charity; and the Excellency of  
Charity above Faith and Hope.

*1 COR. XIII. 13.*

*And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these  
three; but the greatest of these is Charity.*

**I**N the foregoing Chapter, St. Paul dis-  
cusses largely of the various extraordi-  
nary Gifts, which the Holy Spirit at  
that time bestowed in great plenty upon the  
Church, and which were usually held in a  
very high Esteem by the Persons who possess-  
ed them. The Apostle does not disapprove the  
Zeal which the *Corinthians* expressed for them,  
but declares that it was their Duty to value  
and improve them: But at the same time he  
lets them know, that there was something  
that was far more excellent in its Nature, and  
that

SERM. that was to be much more valued, and earnest-

VII. ~~by desired by them, than any spiritual Gifts~~

*whatsoever.* Upon this, he breaks out, in this Chapter, in a sort of Rapture, in the commendation of Charity, declaring it to be the most noble, beneficial, and permanent Quality that we can partake of, and to be far preferable to all kinds of miraculous Gifts, to the greatest natural Abilities, and the most shining outward Performances; and not only to these, but even to the divine Graces of Faith and Hope, those two great Principles of the Christian Life, which next to Charity, are of all things of the greatest necessity and use in this World. *And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity.*

In discoursing on this Subject, I will observe the following Method:

I. I will explain the distinct Natures of *Faith, Hope, and Charity.*

II. I will shew the Excellency of *Charity*, above *Faith* and *Hope*, and upon what accounts it is preferred before them.

Lastly, I will conclude with a few Remarks upon the whole.

I. I will explain the distinct Natures of *Faith, Hope, and Charity.*

As

As to the first of these; I need not upon SERM. VII.  
this occasion take notice of all the different  
Acceptations of *Faith*: I shall only observe  
that *Faith*, strictly, is an Assent given upon  
Testimony, but in a more loose and general  
sense, it is put for the Assent that we give  
to many Propositions, the Truth of which  
we infer purely by the Exercise of our own  
intelligent and rational Powers. Thus not  
only an Assent to Revelation and the peculiar  
Doctrines which it contains, the Truth of  
which depends upon the Authority and Tes-  
timony of the Revealer; but likewise an As-  
sent to the Principles of natural Religion,  
which we may discover to be true by the use  
of Reason, antecedently to all positive Instruc-  
tion or Revelation concerning them, is com-  
monly called *Faith*. It is certain that an As-  
sent to the Doctrines both of natural and re-  
vealed Religion, is the Notion of *Faith*, which  
is delivered in many places of the New Testa-  
ment: And this seems to be plainly *St. Paul's*  
Notion of it in this place; *Faith* in this sense  
being properly mentioned in conjunction with  
*Hope* and *Charity*, as a Principle which in-  
fluences the Conduct of Christians, and as  
being of constant use to us, as the other two  
Principles also are, while we continue in this  
World. Concerning this *Faith*, I shall only  
remark



SERM. remark this farther, that it is absolutely necessary that it be a lively operative Principle, strengthening and assisting our good Dispositions, and supporting us in a steady Course of Virtue. If it be not such a Principle, it will be altogether useless, as is sufficiently plain from St. *James's* Comparison of an unactive Faith, to a dead Body; *For as the Body without the Spirit is dead, so Faith without Works, is dead also.* And to make our Faith thus lively and active, we should take care that it be the result of Inquiry and Conviction, and not an indolent, lazy, and merely formal Assent to the religious Tenets, which have been inculcated upon us from our Infancy, and which happen to be the prevailing Opinions in the Country where we live. This slight and careless Belief is easily baffled by Temptations, as is evident from daily Examples, and can have but little Force, in comparison of what that Faith would have, which is founded on a serious Consideration of Things, and a rational Persuasion of the Truth of the Principles of natural Religion, and of the Credibility of the Testimonies upon which we receive the Doctrines of Revelation. This Faith would be a Rock, on which we might stand unmoveable against the strongest Assaults of our spiritual Enemies, would give us a sure

*Victory*

*Victory over the World*, and carry us safely through all the Difficulties that we can ever meet with in Religion. SERM.  
VII.

I proceed now to the Consideration of *Hope*, the second of those Principles of a good Conduct which *St. Paul* here mentions. It is so common for Men to express their Hope of Things, and they so well know the state of Mind they are in when they do so, that the Nature of Hope in general cannot perhaps be made plainer than it already is to every one, by any Description that can be given of it. We may only take notice, that the Object of Hope is always some future Good, which we think may probably be obtained by us. Now the great Good which the Gospel proposes, being eternal Life in another World; the Hope of Christians consists chiefly in the Expectation which they have of being admitted at last into that State of everlasting Perfection and Happiness, which their Religion reveals and promises. That this may be a Hope which will not be disappointed, it should arise from a Consciousness of our sincere Endeavours to fulfil the Condition of the Gospel Covenant. I know indeed that many are apt to imagine themselves entitled to the Promises of the Gospel, and to be full of Hopes of enjoying all the Happiness which it offers, upon  
some

SER. M. some very different Foundations; such as the  
 VII. secret Purpose of God predestinating them to  
 eternal Life, the zealous Profession of a pure  
 Faith, the being Members of a true Church,  
 a regular Attendance upon the external Duties  
 of Piety and Devotion, an incomplete or  
 partial Practice of Virtue, a strong Confidence  
 in the Merits of *Christ*, the Efficacy of Ab-  
 solutions, and a death-bed Sorrow for Sin.  
 But these are very wretched Grounds for  
 supporting the Hopes of Christians, and will  
 certainly fail the Persons who build upon  
 them. It is abundantly evident both from  
 the express Declarations of the Gospel, and  
 our natural Notions of the Divine Nature, that  
 nothing can be the Foundation of a reason-  
 able Confidence towards God, and of a solid  
 Hope of future Happiness, but the Know-  
 ledge of our own Integrity; the Consciouf-  
 ness of an entirely virtuous Mind, which is  
 disengaged from every Vice, and stedfastly  
 inclined to all Holiness. Upon this ground,  
 and upon this alone, we may look up with  
 confidence to our Heavenly Father, and en-  
 tertain a Hope of immortal Happiness, which  
 will be *sure and stedfast*, which will be fully  
 answered at last, and which may administer  
 the greatest Consolation and Joy to us, as  
 long as we remain in this World.

The



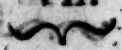
The last Principle which I am to explain is SERM.

*Charity.* I shall not here mention any of the vulgar limited Senses which are put upon the word Charity; but shall observe that Charity, in the most proper sense, is Benevolence or Good-will to others, or a Disposition to promote their Happiness. This Disposition is to be exercised in some measure towards all sensitive Natures, or all Beings susceptible of Pain or Pleasure: But it is of most importance to consider Charity, as it is to be exercised towards rational and moral Agents. Charity to these is a Desire of the proper Happiness of their Nature, and delight in it so far as it is enjoyed by them. This Charity towards rational Agents is usually accompanied with some Esteem of them, on account of their moral Capacities and virtuous Qualities; and, if we have any considerable Opinion of their Worth, with a Desire of Society and Friendship with them, and Delight in the Hope or Enjoyment of these. But these Sensations and Affections are distinct from the Disposition of Charity or Love itself which we express towards them, which is properly Benevolence, or a Desire of their Happiness. The rational Agents towards whom we are to exercise our Love, are chiefly God the Father of reasonable Beings, and Author of all  
their

VII.

SERM. their Powers and Perfections : and Mankind,  
 VII. our Fellow-creatures and Brethren, made  
 after the Image of God, to whom we are inseparably united, and to whom we have the greatest Opportunities of being useful.

As for our Love of God ; it may, perhaps, be thought that this cannot be properly called a Desire of his Happiness, since that may be looked upon as something which is already perfect, fixed, and immutable : But however perfect and permanent the Divine Happiness may be, we may certainly have the same Inclination towards its Continuance, which we have towards the Continuance of any Good which we know a Friend securely enjoys, and be highly pleased with the Thoughts of its Stability, and may likewise contribute our part to the filling up that Scheme, which the Divine Wisdom and Goodness have laid for the universal Happiness of the Creation, from the Approbation and Accomplishment of which, the Happiness of God, according to any rational Notion that we can form of it, must chiefly arise. And this kind Affection towards the Deity, may have all the other Affections and Sensations going along with it in the highest degree, which are the usual Concomitants of Love : For if we naturally esteem and honour the Persons whom  
 we

we love, in proportion to the Goodness of SERM.  
 their Characters; surely we cannot but have VII.  
 the utmost Esteem and Reverence of Him,   
 who is possessed of all Goodness, without the  
 least Mixture or Alloy of any opposite Quality,  
 and who is the Original of all that is lovely,  
 good and worthy in the Universe: If we are  
 earnestly desirous of the Friendships of wise  
 and good Men, put a great value upon them,  
 and think ourselves happy in them; how  
 much more solicitous must we be to obtain  
 the Friendship of that Being, who is perfectly  
 wise, good, and powerful, and the Author  
 of those very Dispositions and Powers which  
 incline and enable Men to be friendly one to-  
 wards another? If we can say upon certain  
 Grounds that this Being is our Friend, that  
 we have an Interest in his Wisdom, Power,  
 and Goodness, which are all employed for  
 our Happiness, how delightful must the Con-  
 sideration be! We must certainly have a vastly  
 higher Relish of his Favour, than of all hu-  
 man Friendships, and may make ourselves  
 contented and joyful in the Sense of it, if even  
 all other Comforts should fail us, according  
 to what the Prophet declares of himself.

*Although the Fig-tree shall not blossom, neither* Hab. iii.  
*shall Fruit be in the Vines, the Labour of the* 17, 18.  
*Olive shall fail, and the Fields shall yield no*



**SERM.** *Meat, the Flock shall be cut off from the Fold,*  
**VII.** *and there shall be no Herd in the Stalls: yet I*  
*will rejoice in the Lord, I will have Joy in*  
*the God of my Salvation.*

To proceed now to the Consideration of the Nature and Extent of Charity, with respect to Mankind: It will be easily apprehended, that our Love of them may be properly said to be a Desire of their Happiness: They are necessitous and infirm Creatures, who must necessarily have a Dependence upon one another for the Supply of manifold Wants, and a great part of the positive Comforts and Enjoyments of Life. It has therefore pleased the wise and good Author of our Beings, to provide a Remedy against those Evils to which we should be subject, from the Indigency and Frailty of our State, by forming us with a Disposition of Charity, or with tender, social, friendly, and generous Affections towards each other which unite us in one Body, making us to feel one another's Sorrows and Joys, and to do what we can, for removing or alleviating the Miseries that are in the World, and for making every Person easy and happy. Our Benevolence indeed will always exert itself more strongly towards some than others, according as it is assisted and strengthened by natural Affection, the Obligations of Friendship

ship or Gratitude, and the Observation of SERM.  
eminent Virtue: But in some degree it must VII.

extend to the whole Human Kind, making us most sincerely to wish the Prosperity of all Men, and disposing us to be as eminently and extensively useful, as our Abilities, Stations, and Circumstances will allow of, in the Communities to which we belong, and among all, to whom our Influence can any way reach. This universal Love of Mankind, and this Concern for the Welfare of the Publick, are indeed the noblest parts of that Charity of which Men are Objects, and should be carefully cherished and cultivated by us, for making us as general Benefactors, as it is possible for us to be, and for restraining the Excesses not only of our selfish Passions, but also of our particular good Affections, which, however amiable when exercised consistently with the common Good of Society, yet always appear as evil and pernicious Qualities, when indulged to such a degree of Fondness, as makes us for the sake of the private and confined Interests of our Families, Friends, and Favourites, to neglect or prejudice the general and more enlarged Interests of Mankind, and of our Country, which are always chiefly to be regarded by us.

SERM. Having thus explained, so far as is here necessary, the Natures of *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Charity*, I come now to consider the Excellency of *Charity*, above *Faith* and *Hope*, and upon what accounts it is preferred before them.

I. The Excellency of *Charity* above *Faith* and *Hope*, will soon appear to any one who will but attend to the Nature and Use of these several Principles. *Faith* and *Hope* are indeed things which are extremely necessary and useful for strengthening us against the Temptations to which we are unavoidably exposed in our present indigent and infirm State, and for supporting and enlivening us in the steady Profession and Exercise of Religion and Virtue; and without them, it is certain, that but very few, if any at all, would be able to adhere uniformly to their Duty, and to attain to the true Perfection and End of their Beings. But after this is granted, it must be owned, that the whole use of *Faith* and *Hope*, consists in their subserviency to advance and secure the great End of Religion, in being proper Means to excite and preserve good Dispositions in us; and that if they be not effectual to these Purposes, as through our own fault they often are not, they are not of the least significance. Now something more may  
be



be said in favour of Charity, that it is a Qua-  
 lity which is intrinsically and immediately  
 good, which is lovely and excellent in itself,  
 and the very End, which, Faith and Hope,  
 as Means, are designed to promote in us. This  
 must be evident to all who are at pains to re-  
 flect on the nature of these three Principles,  
 as well as what we are taught concerning the  
 Use and Design of them in the New Testa-  
 ment; where Faith, we are told, is a Prin-  
 ciple which is *to work by Love*, or to raise a  
 Temper of Charity in us; and where, it is  
 said, to receive its *Perfection* from the good  
 Works which it produces; where Hope like-  
 wise is represented as productive of the same  
 Fruits of Goodness; and Charity is declared  
 to be the highest *Perfection, the Completion,*  
 and *End of all Religion.*

2. But the superior Excellency of *Charity*  
 will farther appear, from considering the Va-  
 lue of it in raising the Characters of Men, and  
 that it is indeed the principal Quality in the  
 most illustrious and divine Characters, of  
 which we have any Knowledge or Concep-  
 tion. What is it that gives us an Opinion of  
 the Merit of Men, and recommends them  
 to any high Degree of our Esteem? It is not  
 a sound Belief, or the Profession of a true  
 Faith, though it should be accompanied with

SERM.

VII.

Gal. v. 6.

Jam. ii.

Col. i. 5, 6.

John

iii. 3.

Matth. v.

48.

Rom.

xiii. 8.

1 Tim i. 5.

SERM. the greatest Zeal ; it is not the most confident

**VII.** Expectation of the Mercy of God, and the fullest Assurance of the heavenly Happiness ; it is not any Knowledge, nor any natural or spiritual Gifts : These, and such like things, may possibly amuse and captivate some injudicious Minds, but are very little regarded by Persons of Consideration and Discernment, in comparison of the Dispositions of Piety, Humanity, Friendship, Publick-spiritedness, and Generosity, which must be allowed by all who reflect on them, to be the noblest Accomplishments of our Nature, and which never fail to advance those, who prudently exert them, to the highest Order and Rank of Mankind. What was it but the divine Goodness and Charity of our Blessed Saviour, which rendered his Character so amiable and excellent as it is ? Though he possessed all *the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*, and *spake as never Man spake* ; though he performed the most surprising Miracles ; though he received the greatest Marks of the divine Favour, and had the most glorious Attestations given to his Mission from Heaven ; yet none of these things can make such Impressions upon our Hearts, and excite such a lovely Idea of him in our Minds, as the Delight which he took in promoting the Honour of  
God,

God, and in doing good to Mankind; as his SERM.  
 Compassion to a perishing World; as that VII.  
 Love which prompted him to leave *the Bosom*  
*of the Father*, and to appear among Men in  
*the Form of a Servant*, and to submit to the  
 greatest Indignities and Miseries of human  
 Life, that he might more effectually advance  
 the true Perfection and Happiness of our  
 Nature. This is what makes him appear in  
 the most glorious Light, and must for ever  
 endear him to every good Mind, and is the  
 very Crown and Perfection of all his Excel-  
 lencies.

And when we reflect upon the divine Na-  
 ture itself, and what it is that we most ad-  
 mire in it, and account its greatest Glory;  
 is it not evidently the Attribute of Goodness?  
 In God there is properly neither Faith nor  
 Hope, nor many other things, which are  
 reckoned Perfections and useful Qualities in  
 us; yet he is not the less perfect and amiable  
 for the want of them, but is indeed the most  
 excellent and lovely of all Beings, as he is  
 possessed of infinite Goodness; as he is intent  
 upon promoting the universal Happiness of  
 his Creatures, and is always employing the  
 most proper Means, which his infinite Wis-  
 dom and Power can suggest and furnish him  
 with, for effecting it. This is what gives us



SERM. the noblest Idea of him that can be, beyond  
 VII. which it is not possible to form an Imagina-  
 tion of any thing great and excellent. So  
 that Charity being the principal Beauty and  
 highest Quality in the best Characters, and  
 most excellent Natures, it may, certainly,  
 be justly said, to be greater than Faith and  
 Hope, and indeed than all the other Dispo-  
 sitions and Principles which are to be found  
 in Mankind.

3. *Charity* may be preferred before *Faith*  
 and *Hope*, because it hath a more direct and  
 immediate Influence on the Happiness of  
 Men, than they have. I do not now speak  
 of the publick Happiness of Society, though  
 undoubtedly, Charity, of all the Principles in  
 the human Mind, most directly promotes that,  
 but of the private Happiness which every In-  
 dividual enjoyeth in himself. The Experi-  
 ence and Reflection of Men may convince  
 them that the principal Source from whence  
 this immediately arises, is a sincerely pious,  
 humane, friendly, and kind Temper; that  
 from hence we naturally receive Joys the  
 most pure and satisfying, which most nearly  
 and intimately affect us, giving us a noble  
 relish of ourselves, and of the Dignity of our  
 Nature, and abiding always with us to sup-  
 port and revive us, when most other Com-  
 forts

forts fail. Faith and Hope, it is certain, add SERM.  
very considerably to our Happiness, as they VII.  
open to us a most beautiful and delightful  
Scene, in which we see all things contrived and ordered under the Direction of a perfectly wise, powerful, and good Mind, to the general Happiness of the Universe; and Provision made for the Continuance of our Being, and the Increase of all our most valuable Joys, after this mortal State is ended. But the Foundation of our Happiness, is not laid in these: It springs directly from the good Temper of our Minds, from our Reverence, Love, and Gratitude to God, from our Good-will to Mankind, from our Compassion, Friendship and Benignity; and unless these be the prevailing Dispositions in our Hearts, it is impossible that any Belief of a Deity, and a good Providence, or that any Prospect of an After-existence can make us easy; but we must soon grow weary of any State, in which we have no Consciousness of any internal Worth, and no Experience of the Joys of Love and good Offices, which are really the Life of all our Pleasures, and necessary to make Existence, for any considerable time, agreeable or even tolerable to us. Such a necessary and immediate Dependance has the Happiness of Men on a Temper of Charity;  
upon

§ B R M upon which account it may very well be valued above Faith and Hope, which however useful they may be, are not so much, nor so immediately useful to us, as it is.

Lastly, *Charity* is greater than *Faith* and *Hope*, because it is of a more fixed and immutable Nature than they are. This Permanency of *Charity* is a Circumstance particularly noticed by *St. Paul*; and one Reason of the Preference which he gives it above Prophecies, Miracles, Faith, and Hope. These things which are of great use, as Supports of Religion, and as Means to carry on the End of it in this weak and imperfect state of our Beings, will all cease, when we arrive to a state of greater Accomplishment and Perfection in another World. The clear, intuitive, and comprehensive Views, which we shall then obtain of things, and the immediate Perception and Feeling which we shall have of the divine Goodness, will supersede the Necessity of those defective and partial Methods of Information which we now enjoy, and will leave no room for the Exercise of *Faith* and *Hope*. But *Charity* never faileth: Its Nature will not decay or change: It will indeed be very much heightened and improved in the heavenly State, from a more habitual and lively Sense of the Excellence of



of the Divine Nature, and from a closer SERM.  
Attachment to the whole System of intelli- VII.  
gent Beings, than our Condition and Cir-  
cumstances in this World will allow us to  
have. But the same Disposition of Bene-  
volence and Goodness, which is our chief  
Glory and our truest Happiness here, will  
continue to be likewise our highest Perfection  
and Happiness in every Period and State  
of our Existence hereafter. This then may  
convince us of the great Dignity of Charity,  
and of its Preeminence and Superiority when  
compared with Faith and Hope, which are  
things designed to be of use to us only during  
the present Infancy of our Being, and will  
not go along with us into any higher Scene;  
whereas Charity will flourish most in Heaven,  
and be our greatest Ornament, and a thing of  
the utmost consequence to our Happiness,  
in the highest State to which we shall ever  
be exalted.

I shall now conclude with a few Remarks  
upon what has been discoursed.

1. We may observe how exactly Christi-  
anity falls in with the Dictates of Nature,  
and how much it consults the Interest and  
Happiness of Mankind, by making so great  
an account of Charity, and marking it out to

SERM. us for the highest and noblest Principle of  
VII. Action. When we reflect on the several Dis-  
positions and Principles belonging to our Na-  
ture, and consider which of them is the most  
worthy and excellent, and the most conducive  
to our Happiness, Charity is the one which  
is always most approved by us: When this  
Disposition prevails strongly in the Heart, and  
has its proper Influence and Effect upon the  
Life and Conduct, it has a most amiable and  
venerable Appearance; our Consciences can-  
not but esteem it as our greatest Ornament  
and Excellency, and our Reason and Expe-  
rience teach us, that it is the most certain and  
effectual means of promoting our own Hap-  
piness, and the Happiness of others also, so  
far as that may depend upon our Endeavours.  
Now this Disposition, which is naturally so  
amiable, and so beneficial, Christianity hath  
inculcated above all others, and recommended  
with peculiar Advantages, placing it in the  
first Rank and Order of its Duties, and decla-  
ring it to be of the utmost moment in Religion,  
and greater than all other things in it, to be  
the best Foundation of a worthy Conduct,  
and the Sum and Perfection of all Virtue.  
Thus indeed it might be expected that the  
Gospel, supposing it to be really a Divine  
Revelation, would agree with the Voice of  
Nature,

Nature, in declaring the Excellence and Importance of Charity: And certainly it is no small Recommendation of the Christian Religion, that it agrees so fully with the Suggestions of Nature in these points. This Circumstance, though it is not sufficient without external Proofs to evince the Divine Original of the Gospel, may at least procure it the Attention and Favour of Mankind, and cannot fail to make all, who have any Sense of Virtue and Humanity, to wish well to an Institution, which is so evidently calculated to advance the Perfection and Happiness of the human Nature. SERM. VII.

2. We may observe how unjust it is to charge the Doctrine of Charity, or the pure Love of God and of Mankind, with Enthusiasm, and Inconsistency with the Principles of the Christian Religion. One who is not acquainted with the Subtleties and Refinements of many of our Philosophers, but who only follows the Guidance of Nature, and reads with an unprejudiced Mind the Declarations of the New Testament, will probably be not a little surprized to find such a Charge advanced against this Doctrine, and think it enough for confuting it, to bid any Man reflect on what he feels within himself, and to attend impartially to the plain Assertions of



SERM. of our Saviour and his Apostles. There is

VII.  certainly a Foundation in Nature for asserting that there is such a thing as pure Charity or disinterested Love in Mankind; that we have Affections implanted in us, which lead us, without any regard to our own Interest, to please and do good to others, in numberless Instances. We may have an internal Consciousness and Perception of these Affections; and they appear very plainly in a great part of our external Conduct, which is never to be accounted for in any tolerable manner, unless it be supposed to arise from them. So that it is far from being the Effect of Enthusiasm or fanciful Imagination, to say that we are to act disinterestedly, or from pure Love: This is indeed only to do justice to the Author of our Nature, and that wise and good Order in which he has been pleased to frame it. It is certain likewise that the Christian Religion makes Charity its main Principle, and magnifies it above all other Qualities and Virtues. Our Saviour expressly declares the *Love of God and of our Neighbour* to be the principal Part, the very Life and Substance of true Religion; and St. Paul tells us, that Charity is the *End of the Commandment*, and greater than all other matters in Religion. And the same thing may

may be concluded from the general Strain SERM.  
of the Exhortations and Directions that we VII.  
meet with in the New Testament. How  
then comes the Doctrine of pure Charity to  
be inconsistent with the Principles of Chri-  
stianity? Is it because the Gospel speaks of  
our acting from some other Principles besides  
that of generous Love, and establishes its Laws  
with Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments,  
which operate upon our selfish Passions, and  
determine us from private Considerations to  
do the things which it requires? This has  
indeed been suggested; but how wisely, let  
all Men of the least Reflection judge. For  
may not both the selfish and generous Af-  
fections of our Nature be very consistently  
applied to, and brought to conspire in the  
same End? Is it not indeed necessary that  
they should co-operate, for keeping us stedfast  
in the Practice of Virtue? For if they did  
not, our selfish Passions would certainly re-  
tard our Progress in Virtue, and make us  
fall off from it in many Cases. Nothing  
therefore can be wiser than the Method which  
the Gospel has taken for securing our Steadi-  
ness in our Duty, by giving both the private  
and benevolent Dispositions of our Nature the  
same Turn and Tendency, by assuring us that  
our Interest and Duty are closely connected,  
and

SERM. and that we can by no means provide for  
VII. our own Happiness so well as by doing those  
things, which the sweet and kind Propensions  
of our Hearts naturally lead and prompt us  
to. Thus the most powerful Obstacle to the  
Practice of Virtue, arising from an Appre-  
hension of its Inconsistency with our private  
Interest is removed, and the generous Af-  
fections of our Nature may freely exert them-  
selves, which they must do if we would an-  
swer the Intention of the Christian Religion,  
and attain to that Height of Perfection which  
it requires. For it would be most injurious to  
this excellent Institution, to suppose that it  
will be contented with our acting solely and  
constantly from the low Motive of private In-  
terest. The Gospel is far from containing  
such narrow and selfish Discipline as this:  
Though it hath amply provided for the Gra-  
tification of our Self-Love, that we may be  
under no Temptation to desert our Duty, for  
the sake of our Interest, in any Case, but  
that we may even from hence be excited to  
acquire and strengthen, by all proper means,  
all virtuous Dispositions in ourselves; yet it  
hath withal inculcated a much more noble  
and generous Principle of Action, even a pure  
disinterested Desire of pleasing God, and pro-  
moting the Happiness of our Fellow-Creatures,  
which



which must habitually influence and govern our Conduct, or it can never be agreeable to the Design and Spirit of Christianity: SERM.  
VII.

3. We may take notice how absurd and preposterous it is for Christians to contend so vehemently and eagerly about the Articles of their Faith; and any of their religious Tenets, as to violate the Rules of Charity, and disturb the Peace and Happiness of Mankind. So much hath a Spirit of Strife and Contention about the doctrinal parts of Religion, and the peculiar Opinions of the different Sects in it, prevailed above a Zeal for true Piety, for the Preservation of Christian Love and Unity, and for promoting the Prosperity and Happiness of human Society; that if one were to judge of the Design of Christianity, not from the Doctrine of its Author, but the Conduct of its Professors, he would certainly conclude that the great thing enjoined and recommended by it was not a Temper of Piety and Humanity, but an orthodox Belief, and accurate way of thinking concerning all the abstruse and intricate Points in Religion; that the Knowledge of our Duty was of much more importance than the Practice of it; and that Almighty God was better pleased with our filling our Heads with barren Speculations, than our Hearts with Goodness and

SERM. Love. But whoever reads the New Testa-

VII. ment with the least Impartiality must soon see that the Design of the Gospel is far different from what the Practice of its Professors would insinuate it to be; that it intends to subdue all our angry Passions; and to work in us a Disposition of universal Compassion and Benevolence, to make us patiently bear with one another's involuntary Mistakes, and to contend even for necessary Truths in the Spirit of Love and Meekness; to do nothing to inflame the Differences and widen the Breaches which are among Men, but to do all in our power to compose and heal them; that it teaches us to value Charity far above any sort of Faith and Knowledge, and to be much more solicitous to proselyte Men to true Goodness than to make them the Disciples of any Party whatsoever. This, I say, is what any one may easily discern to be the Design of the Christian Religion; and that therefore that violent and factious Spirit, which under the Notion of Zeal for the Purity of the Faith, and a necessary Defence of the Truth, divides and distracts the Churches of *Christ*, fills the Hearts of Christians with bitter Envy and Hatred against one another, and often breeds great Confusion and Misery in the civil Communities  
of

of Men, is most shamefully absurd in all who SERM.  
 profess a Veneration for the Gospel. The VII.  
 Inconsistency of this Temper with the End of  
 Christianity is indeed so very apparent,  
 that it must be a most blind and ungovernable  
 Zeal that can hinder any from perceiving it.  
 It is certain that all who reflect calmly upon  
 it, must condemn it as the most preposter-  
 ous and inexcusable thing in Christians that  
 can be.

4. Lastly, From what has been discoursed,  
 we may remark wherein that Perfection, which  
 we should be always aspiring and growing  
 up to, consists; even in a Temper of Love  
 freely exerting itself in all the Acts of a ra-  
 tional Piety and Devotion towards God, and  
 of a generous and extensive Beneficence to  
 Mankind. This is what both the Frame of  
 our Nature, and the Declarations of God in  
 his Word, point out to us as our highest End  
 and our greatest Excellence and Accomplish-  
 ment. This Temper, therefore, we should  
 by all means raise and cherish in ourselves,  
 and never be contented with any lower At-  
 tainments in Religion. It may perhaps be  
 allowable for those, who are but newly en-  
 tered upon Religion, and who are to be con-  
 sidered only as *Babes* and *little Children* in it,  
 to act from a less generous and perfect Dis-  
 P 2 position;



SERM. position ; but it may certainly be expected of  
 VII. all who are of any considerable standing in  
 the Profession of Religion, that they should  
 proceed upon many and noble Principles ;  
 that they should offer to God an ingenuous  
 and liberal Service ; that they should perform  
 their good Works, not from Constraint and  
 Fear, but from a Mind touched with a lively  
 Sense of the Beauty of Virtue, with tender  
 Impressions of Gratitude towards God, and a  
 sincere and pure Good-will to Mankind.  
 These are the Dispositions which must be al-  
 ways prevailing and growing in us, if we  
 would arrive at the true Perfection of Chri-  
 stianity, act up to the Dignity of our own  
 Beings, and prepare ourselves for that perfect  
 and happy State into which we hope to enter  
 hereafter, where all other Affections and Prin-  
 ciples of Action being done away, pure Love  
 will influence our Behaviour for evermore.

SERMON

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## SERMON VIII.

The Evidence of a future Judgment, and its Influence for engaging Men to Repentance.

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ACTS XVII. 30, 31.

*And the Times of this Ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all Men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a Day in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead.*

**T**HE Consideration of a future Judgment, which is a thing very fully discovered and ascertained by the Gospel, is frequently inculcated by our Lord and his Apostles, as a strong Motive and Ar-

SERM. argument for reclaiming Men from their Sins,  
 VIII. and for engaging them to Repentance and the  
 Practice of Virtue : St. *Paul* particularly declares in the Text, that now that God has given the World the most authentick Assurance of an universal righteous Judgment, by the Resurrection of his Son from the Dead, he more than ever insists upon the Repentance of Men. The former *Times of Ignorance* he winked at ; he did not so severely animadvert as he might justly have done, upon the Corruption and Wickedness of Mankind for several Ages preceding the Revelation of the Gospel, in which the great Truths and Principles of Religion were most unhappily obscured, and in some measure lost, in that heap of Absurdity and Folly, which the Weakness and Superstition of Men had introduced ; but now since the Doctrine of our Saviour has not only revived the natural Law, but has confirmed and enforced it with much stronger Sanctions than it had before, by a clear Revelation of a State of endless Rewards and Punishments, to which every one will be adjudged in another World, according to his good or bad Conduct in this, God expects that Mankind will suffer this Consideration to have its proper Weight and Influence upon them, and commands them  
 all,



all, upon pain of his highest Displeasure, SERM.  
VIII.  
which is to be declared in the future Judgment against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, to forsake their evil Ways, and to lead Lives of the strictest Piety, Purity, and Virtue: But now commandeth all Men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a Day, in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead. In treating of this Subject, I shall,

I. Consider what Evidence and Assurance we have of a future Judgment.

II. Shew what Force the Consideration of this should have for engaging Men to Repentance and a Reformation of their Lives.

*First*, I shall consider what Evidence and Assurance we have of a future Judgment. Now though this Point has received the fullest Confirmation from the Gospel, which must take away from the Minds of all who embrace it, every Doubt and Suspicion about the Certainty of a future Judgment; yet our Belief of it does not depend entirely upon the Testimony of Revelation, nor were Man-

SERM. kind before the coming of our Saviour with-  
VIII. out an Expectation and Persuasion of it.

There were hardly any Notions that prevailed more universally in the Heathen World, than that there was to be a future State; that Mankind were to be brought to an equitable and impartial Trial in it; and in consequence of that, to be fixed in a State of Happiness or Misery, in proportion to the Good or Evil which they did in this World. The Vulgar, it must be owned, for the most part received this Doctrine as it was dressed out in the Fictions and fabulous Representations of the Poets; but this, though it diminished the good Effect and Influence of the Doctrine upon them, yet did not usually hinder their having a firm Belief of it: And as for the wiser Men among them, some of these at least, had not only a strong Hope of a future State, but seemed to have a very rational Notion of the Nature of that State, and of the Justice, Impartiality, and universal Extent of the Judgment which Men would undergo upon their Entrance into it. Now the Grounds and Reasons upon which these wise Heathens entertained the Opinion of a future State, and a future Judgment, and upon which we may still entertain the same, antecedently to the Notices of Revelation, are briefly such as these following:

1. The

I. The Nature of the Soul of Man, seems SERM.  
plainly to declare that it is made for a future VIII.  
Existence, and for appearing in another Scene   
after this Life is ended. Whoever with any  
attention reflects upon his own Soul, may  
easily perceive it to be of an entirely different  
Nature from the Body: that it is one simple in-  
divisible Substance, though the Subject of va-  
rious and distinct Powers, and not like the  
Body a Composition of innumerable Parts,  
which may be all disjoined and separated from  
one another; that it is endowed with many  
Powers and Affections, such as Thought and  
Reason, Judgment and Choice, Love and  
Hatred, Joy and Sorrow, which can never be  
the Properties or Effects of Matter in any  
possible Variation or Modification of its Parts.  
Who can seriously affirm that Matter, a brute  
inactive thing, which is only moved when it  
is acted upon and impelled from without, can  
by any Alteration of the Situation, Size, and  
Figure of its Particles, ever produce the low-  
est Sensation? And how much less can it pro-  
duce those noble and divine Sentiments, those  
sublime and generous Affections to which the  
Soul of Man sometimes rises up, in its Con-  
templations of God and Virtue, the Order of  
the Universe, and that Providence which sus-  
tains and governs all things? Certainly all At-  
tempts



SERM. tempts to account for these things upon mere

VIII. mechanical Principles, or by any Laws of

Nature obtaining in the corporeal World, are absolutely ridiculous. The Soul therefore is an immaterial Principle, and from this Immateriality of the Soul, though we cannot infer such a necessary Immortality of it, as is independent of the Power and Will of its Creator; yet, we may conclude that the Dissolution of the Body will not infer the Dissolution of the Soul, but that this, on the contrary, is naturally framed for a State of Immortality; and that it seems to be the Intention of its Creator in making it of such a nature, that it should survive the corruptible Body, and think, and act, and enjoy in a State separate from it, and with more Freedom and Enlargement, in all probability, than in its present state of Confinement and Union to the Body, it can do. This appears still more probable, when we consider what great Capacities and noble Faculties the Soul is possessed of, that it has a force of Reason which can penetrate far into the Causes and Dependencies of things, which can invent the most useful Arts, and make the most surprising Discoveries in almost every part of the the Universe; that it has a Wisdom which is able to conduct the most momentous Affairs of this World, and a Memory stored with

with an almost infinite Treasure of Knowledge ; that it has many amiable Instincts and generous Affections, with a divine relish and love of Virtue: That Nature, which is the Subject of such great Endowments, and such excellent Qualities, may, agreeably to the reasoning of some of the Ancients, be justly presumed to be more than mortal ; especially considering that the Powers and Faculties of the Soul never arrive in this World at a full state of Perfection, not even in those who have the greatest Opportunities for cultivating the Mind, and who apply themselves to it with the utmost diligence : After all the Improvements which the wisest and best of Mankind make in Knowledge and Virtue, they find not only an insatiable Desire, but a real Capacity of greater Knowledge, and greater Virtue remaining in them ; that their Minds are not to be satisfied with any Acquisitions in Wisdom and Goodness ; that their taste for these things, particularly for the latter, instead of being decayed and worn out with Use and Time, is always growing more strong and lively. And if the most refined and generous Spirits among Mankind, do necessarily in this Life fall short of the true Perfection of their Nature, how much more evidently must this be the case of the main body of Men, who,  
in

SERM. in the hurry and confusion of their worldly

VIII. Affairs, have usually but little Time and Ability for improving their spiritual and divine part, which therefore lies most miserably neglected, and is but little fruitful of those Qualities and Virtues which are its highest Ornaments and Excellencies. The Consequence of all which seems to be, that either this most curious and excellent piece of divine Workmanship, the Soul of Man, has been made in a great measure in vain; or there must be a future State, where it will be brought into a more august and enlarged Scene of Action, where full scope will be given to its Faculties, and they will attain to a degree of Vigour and Perfection infinitely superior to what they could arrive at in this World. Whether the latter be not the more probable Conclusion, let every one of the least Reflection judge.

2. The natural Suggestions and Convictions of Conscience are a farther Confirmation of a future State, and likewise an Argument that Mankind will be brought to a fair and impartial Judgment in it. There is no one who may not be conscious of a Principle in himself, which dictates to him a great Difference between moral Good and Evil, which directs and excites him to practise the one, and prohibits and restrains him from doing the other,

and



and which affords him a great deal of Peace S E R M.  
and Comfort, and joyful Hope; or, fills him V I L  
with Horror and Confusion, and uneasy Pre-  
sages of an After-punishment, according as  
its Directions are observed or transgressed by  
him. This is not a fanciful Representation,  
but a matter of which Mankind may be con-  
vinced from their inward Feeling and Expe-  
rience. Every good Man has a most lively  
Sense of the Approbation of his Conscience,  
and a full Acquiescence in the Testimony  
which it gives to his Integrity, and the Judg-  
ment which it passes upon him: And though  
wicked Men may by various Arts suppress the  
Voice of Conscience, and elude its Corrections  
for a time; yet there are Seasons, in which this  
Principle will revive in them, and assert its  
Right of examining strictly their Behaviour,  
and challenging and condemning them for it,  
and in which it will likewise give them some  
secret Notices of a more authoritative and ef-  
fectual Sentence that will hereafter be pro-  
nounced upon them, conformable to its own.  
The force of this Principle is sometimes very  
remarkable in bad Men, in bringing to light  
their closest and most secret Acts of Wicked-  
ness, and throwing them, even when they  
have nothing to fear from any Power or Au-  
thority upon earth, into great Agonies and  
Convulsions of Mind, upon a mere View of  
their

SERM. their own Guilt; and their fearful Apprehensions of a Divine Vengeance hanging over their Heads, and ready to fall upon them; which Apprehensions are sometimes so strong in their Minds, that it is impossible for them, by all the Efforts of their Wit, by all the Pleasures and Amusements of the World, and by all the Methods that they can make use of, to bear them down, or prevent their giving them extreme Uneasiness and Torment: A plain Argument, that these are not adventitious Notions, derived from Institution and Education; but that they are the genuine Sentiments of Nature, which unavoidably spring up in the Mind, and are inseparable from our Constitution. Now these natural Apprehensions and secret Anticipations which all Men may some time or other feel in themselves, of a future Existence, and a future Judgment, are a good Argument to convince us that these things will really be; it being by no means credible, that Mankind are so capriciously formed, as unavoidably to have an Expectation of these great Events, if after all they are to be disappointed; and to be under a necessity of falling into an universal Delusion in these most important Matters: It may rather be presumed that the Suggestions of Conscience concerning a future Judgment, are designed for a solemn Admonition to them to prepare

prepare for its Approach, and that the Judgment which That now passes upon them, will be seconded and fully confirmed hereafter By the decisive and irreversibile Sentence of God himself. To this purpose we may apply the

SERMON  
VIII.

Words of St. John, *Beloved, if our Hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. But if our Hearts condemn us, how much more will God do so, who is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all things?*

1 Joh. iii.  
20, 21.

3. The Notions which Men naturally have of God and his Providence, may lead them still farther to conclude that there will be a future State, and that Mankind will stand before God in Judgment in it. According to the most obvious Conceptions that we form of the Deity, he is a holy, good, and just Being, who loves Righteousness, and hates Iniquity, and who must necessarily countenance and reward the one, and discourage and punish the other: He appears evidently to be engaged on the side of Virtue in this World, as he has constituted and ordered things so as that Mankind receive the greatest degree of Happiness that they can enjoy from a prudent and steady Adherence to their Duty, and so as their *Wickedness* shall always correct them, and prove in a great measure its own Punishment; so as that the Pious and Just shall have many



SERMON many inward Supports and Comforts under  
 VIII. the Pressures and Calamities of Life; and bad  
 Men shall be frequently full of Uneasiness;  
 and feel inward Stings and Tortures in the  
 greatest Affluence of outward Enjoyments:  
 So that the Goodness and Equity of the Su-  
 preme Governour, and his Regard for the  
 Cause of Virtue, may be discerned in the pre-  
 sent Dispensations of Providence towards Man-  
 kind. As to external Blessings, these are indeed  
 distributed very promiscuously to Persons of  
 all Characters, and sometimes fall in greater  
 abundance to the share of the Wicked than of  
 the Righteous; from whence some have in-  
 ferred that there is no Order, no Goodness or  
 Justice in the present Administration of human  
 Affairs: But this is certainly a very rash and  
 ill-grounded Conclusion. The Honour of the  
 divine Government, the Order and Justice of  
 Providence, are in some Measure secured and  
 vindicated by the natural Rewards and Punish-  
 ments which must always accompany the  
 Virtues and Vices of Men, as they immedi-  
 ately and directly arise out of them. These  
 plainly give Virtue the preference to Vice,  
 even in point of Interest and Advantage.  
 These make the Lot of the Righteous more  
 happy than that of the Wicked, in the ordi-  
 nary course of things at least, to almost every  
 one's

one's Observation. And though in some ex-SERM.  
traordinary Cases the natural Consequences of VIII.

Virtue and Vice are very much obstructed; yet, still there is so much Satisfaction and pleasing Hope flowing from the one, as is a great Relief and Consolation to good Men, in the greatest Difficulties which they must here encounter; and so much Torment and Dread arising from the other, as often interrupts the Happiness, and imbitters the Lives of evil Men; in the height of their worldly Prosperity. There are therefore the Beginnings at least of a just Order in the Administration of the Affairs of Mankind, notwithstanding the Inequalities sometimes between good and bad Men, as to outward Enjoyments. The Goodness and Equity of the universal Governor have provided a Reward for Virtue, though not in every respect so great as it seems to be entitled to; and a Punishment for Wickedness, though not always in such full measure as it deserves, even in this World. And now upon this Foundation we may naturally infer that there will be a time hereafter, in which the Holiness, Justice, and Impartiality of the divine Administration will be still more clear and manifest; when the Triumph of Virtue shall be compleat and full, and good Men shall have not only the inward,

SER.M. but all the outward Tokens likewise of the

VIII. Approbation and Favour of God ; when Vice shall be quite put out of countenance, and appear to the conviction of every one to be the most contemptible and miserable thing that can be. From the good Order which prevails in this present State, we may presume that there is a more perfect Scene to come, in which all the little Irregularities which happen under the present Administration of Providence, (which perhaps could not be prevented, without a greater Inconvenience, by breaking too much in upon the general Plan and established Course of things) will be set right, and the Design of God in his moral Government of Mankind, will receive its Consummation and Accomplishment, and shew itself to be a most noble Scheme, every way worthy of a perfect Mind, and admirably contrived for doing honour to the Cause of Virtue, and for the suppression of Vice ; for promoting the greatest Happiness of good Men, and executing a just Vengeance on all the Workers of Iniquity.

These are Arguments for a future Judgment, which the common Light of Nature and Reason affords us previously to the Testimony of Revelation ; and these Arguments shew it to be a thing exceedingly probable at least,



and have always had so much Evidence and Weight as has been sufficient to establish the greatest part of Mankind pretty firmly in the Belief of it. But because after all the Discoveries which the Light of Nature can make of a future Judgment, it is a thing which has been always denied by some, and has appeared doubtful to many others; it has therefore pleased God in his great Goodness to Mankind, to make an express and authentick Declaration of the truth of it, in the Revelation of the Gospel, which has very fully and clearly delivered this great Doctrine, and given the strongest Confirmation of it, by the Resurrection of our Saviour, which is a solemn Attestation of the truth of his whole Religion, and more particularly of that part of it relating to another Life, and a future Judgment, as it is a sensible Demonstration that Death does not put an end to the Existence of Men, but that upon their leaving this World, they are to enter into a new state, and to enjoy either Happiness or Misery in it. Now this Assurance which the Gospel gives us of a future Judgment, is enough to put it beyond all doubt with us; for besides that the Doctrine which it delivers upon this head, is perfectly agreeable to our natural Sentiments, and the Presumptions of Reason in this Case, it receives

SERM. so great a Support from the Divine Character and Authority of our Saviour, as will be always sufficient to gain the Assent of the most inquisitive and unprejudiced Minds to it, though the natural Evidences of it were less than we find they are.

II. I proceed now to consider what Force there is in the Belief of a future Judgment for engaging Men to Repentance and a Reformation of their Lives.

And *First*, in general ; whenever we seriously reflect that this Life is intended for a State of Tryal and Preparation for an infinitely longer and more important Duration ; that all that we now think and say, design and do, is to come under the Review and Cognisance of a perfectly wise, holy, and righteous Judge, who will render to every Man according to his Desert, and that his Sentence will fix our Fate as to Happiness or Misery for ever ; this surely must leave the deepest Impression upon us, and make us most earnestly solicitous to avoid every thing that we know to be displeasing to our great Judge, and to abound in all that Piety and Virtue which alone can entitle us to his Approbation and Acceptance. Nothing indeed is more surprising than that Men who profess to have an

an Expectation of a future Judgment, should yet have no lively Sense of this in their Minds, but be almost as little attentive to it, and as little influenced by it in their Practice, as those Persons are who profess to have no such Expectation. This is a monstrous Infatuation, and most reproachful to the rational Nature. In all Reason, a small degree of Probability for such an important Event, is enough to excite our Attention to it, and to make us always careful to be in a good State of Preparation for it: And when we have not only a small, but the highest Probability for a future Judgment; when we have such Evidence of it, as leaves no Doubt in our Minds about the Truth of it, certainly, if we would act in any sort as becomes Men, as our Conscience, Reason, and Interest direct us, we shall make this great Event the frequent Subject of our most serious Thoughts, and be above all things concerned, by the Exercise of a true Repentance and a continual Progress in Virtue, to qualify ourselves for receiving a gracious Sentence from our Judge.

This is the Effect which a firm Belief of a future Judgment in general may be naturally expected to have upon us: And to affect us with a more strong Sense of this great Solemnity, and to awaken us to greater Zeal and Diligence



S E R M. gence in our Preparations for it, the Scripture

VIII.

has given us some very moving and affectionate Descriptions of the whole Progress, and the several Circumstances of it; telling

Joh. v. 22. us that the Son of God himself is appointed to be the Judge, and that he will come to

Judgment with the utmost Pomp and Splendor; that he will appear in his own Glory

and his Father's, and have for his Attendants, ten thousands of his Saints, and all the holy

Angels; that he shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with the Voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the trump of God; that at

his Appearance the whole Scene and Fashion of this World shall be changed, that the

present Frame of things shall be dissolved, the Heaven shall pass away with a great

noise, the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also and the Works that

are therein shall be burnt up; that he shall sit upon the Throne of his Glory; and before

him shall be gathered all Nations; that all the Persons then alive, and all the Generations of Men who have ever lived shall

stand before his Throne; for all that are in the Graves shall bear his Voice, the Sea shall

give up the Dead that are in it, and Death and Hell shall give up the Dead that are

in them, that every one may be judged according to his Works; that none of the Actions,

Words,

Words, Designs, and Thoughts of Men, SER M. VIII.  
 how close and hidden soever they may have Eccl. xii. 14.  
 been shall escape his Examination; for God Eccl. xii. 14.  
*shall bring every Work into Judgment, with*  
*every secret thing, whether it be good or whe-*  
*ther it be evil; that the Judgment which*  
*shall be given, shall be so clearly and unex-*  
*ceptionably just, that every Man's Conscience*  
*shall acknowledge the perfect Righteousness*  
*and Equity of it; that good Men alone in*  
*that Day shall appear with great Joy and*  
*Confidence, while the Wicked will be filled*  
*with the most dismal Apprehensions, and*  
*be ready to say to the Mountains and Rocks,* Rev. vi. 16.  
*fall on us, and hide us from the Face of him*  
*that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath*  
*of the Lamb; that the Sentence pronounced*  
*shall be immediately put in execution, the*  
*Wicked being subjected to everlasting Punish-* Match. xxv. 46.  
*ment, and the Righteous being put in pos-*  
*session of Life eternal.* This Representation  
 which the Scripture gives us of this great  
 Transaction, alludes in many particulars to  
 the judiciary Proceedings of Men, and is  
 most affectionately accommodated to our Ca-  
 pacities and Apprehensions, and must upon  
 the whole impress upon our Minds the deep-  
 est Sense of the Solemnity and Perfection  
 of the Divine Judgment, and the Necessity  
 of making the most diligent Preparations for,

SERM. it. Suppose that this great Scene was now  
 VIII. displayed and transacted before our Eyes, that

we had just seen the *Son of Man* coming in  
 Maith. xxiv. 30. *the Clouds of Heaven* in all his *Power and*

*Glory*; that the Dead were raised up, and all  
 Mankind assembled before his Throne; that

the *Judgment was set and the Books opened*,  
 Dan: vii. 10. and every one waiting with the greatest Ex-

pectation for his final Doom; suppose, I say,  
 that we were just now the Spectators of this  
 amazing Scene, it would, without all ques-  
 tion, entirely possess us, take off our Regards  
 from all other Objects, and effectually con-  
 vince us of the Impertinence and Vanity of  
 all the other Employments and Cares of  
 Mankind in comparison of that, of having  
 fitted themselves, by a holy and virtuous  
 Life, for their great and solemn Tryal. And  
 if we really are, what we profess ourselves to  
 be, Believers of the Gospel, we must be per-  
 suaded that this great and affecting Scene will  
 one day be actually presented to us; and cer-  
 tainly, after all the Abatements that are to  
 be made for the Distance of this Event, the  
 Prospect which we have of it, is a most  
 reasonable Foundation for fixing our Atten-  
 tion upon it, and making all necessary Pre-  
 parations for its Approach, by a Reformation  
 of every thing amiss in us, and a hearty and  
 constant



constant Performance of the several Duties of SERM.  
Religion, which only will be able to support VIII.  
us in the Day of Judgment, and entitle us  
to the Mercy of our Judge. Indeed it is  
impossible but that the Prospect which the  
Gospel gives us of the *Judgment to come*, if  
it be but accompanied with a just Sense of the  
Solemnity and Importance of the thing, must  
effectually excite and engage us to all Holi-  
ness: It is plainly owing to a fatal Insensibi-  
lity in Men, to their contenting themselves  
with giving only such a blind and slight As-  
sent to this great Principle of Religion, as  
they usually give to other Truths inculcated  
on them in the Course of their Education,  
without being at any pains to obtain a ratio-  
nal Conviction, and to fix a lively Impres-  
sion of it in their Minds by serious Medita-  
tion, that the Belief of the future Judgment has  
so small an effect on the greatest part of those  
who profess to entertain it. When this great  
Doctrine is received upon rational Grounds,  
and is likewise seriously attended to and viewed  
with all its Consequences, there is undoubted-  
ly force enough in it, for awakening the  
most drowsy Natures, for alarming the most  
hardened Sinners, for taking hold of our most  
prevailing Passions, and making them all con-  
spire in a Resolution of breaking the Habits of  
Vice,

SERM. Vice, and practising all Virtue, which is necessary for securing us from the most dreadful Ruin, and giving us the Hope of the greatest Happiness. The Inference which we shall draw from an attentive and lively Consideration of the future Judgment, can be no other than that of St. Peter, *What manner of Persons ought we to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness, looking for and hasting to the coming of the Day of God: Knowing the Terrors of the Lord, as St. Paul speaks, we shall be persuaded to fly from the Wrath to come, and by a patient Continuance in well-doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality; we shall, according to the Exhortation with which he concludes his Discourse concerning the Resurrection to eternal Life, be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our Labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

2 Pet. iii.  
11, 12.

2 Cor. v.  
11.

Rom. ii. 7.

1 Cor. xv.  
58.

But here, I know, some may be ready to object against the Propriety of urging the Consideration of a future Judgment as a motive to Repentance, since it can only work upon the Hopes and Fears of Men, but never raise any disinterested and generous Affections in them, which yet are the only true Principles of Virtue; nay, that it has rather a tendency to diminish our Affections towards  
publick

publick Good, or the Interest of Society, and SERM.  
to introduce a certain Narrowness of Spirit, VIII.

and too strict an Attachment to ourselves,  
by giving full Scope and continual Exercise  
to our private Passions in a Subject of the  
most extended Self-Interest.

This is an Ob-  
jection, which may be thought to deserve  
some Notice: I shall consider the Force of  
it, and endeavour to set this matter in a  
true Light before I conclude.

And that we may do all possible justice  
to the Objection, it shall be granted, that  
the most perfect, or indeed the only Princi-  
ples of Religion and Virtue, are in their na-  
ture generous and disinterested; such as Re-  
spect and Love to the Deity; Gratitude for  
his Mercies; a Disposition to obey and sub-  
mit to his Will, from a Sense of the per-  
fect Wisdom, Equity, and Goodness of it;  
Compassion and Charity to our Fellow-Crea-  
tures; and a Love of Virtue itself. If our Ac-  
tions do not flow in some measure from these  
noble Principles, let them have ever so fair an  
Outside, they can have but little of real Good-  
ness in them. It shall likewise be admitted,  
that the Consideration of the future Judgment,  
is calculated chiefly for operating upon the  
private Hopes and Fears of Men, or determi-  
ning them by Motives of Interest to the Prac-  
tice



SERMON. tice of their Duty. And yet it will not follow after all this, that the Doctrine of a future Judgment is absurdly or improperly inculcated as an Argument for effecting the Reformation of Men: For though the Consideration of this Event does not directly raise the virtuous Affections, yet it may do a most important Service to the Cause of Virtue, by removing the Prejudices and false Apprehensions of Men about the Inconsistency of their Happiness with their Duty, which must always greatly facilitate the Practice of Virtue, and is absolutely necessary for supporting it in many Cases: Besides that by exciting in Men Desires of that Happiness with which Virtue will at last be rewarded, it must engage them to cultivate the virtuous Affections by all proper Means, such as accustoming their Minds to frequent Reflections on the Perfections of God, and the noble Powers and amiable Qualities of Mankind, which cannot fail to cherish and strengthen these Affections; while at the same time it will effectually fortify them against all the Temptations to Vice arising from any present Advantages that may be supposed to attend it, which can never be put in competition by a Person of the least Consideration with the Felicity of an eternal State. It is likewise to be considered that a  
future

future Judgment, which will do full right SERM.  
to the Merit of every Man, and will finish VIII.  
and perfect the Constitution of the Universe,   
must be an Event so agreeable to a good Man;  
the Prospect of it must be such a constant  
Source of Joy and Peace to him, as will naturally prepare him for the Exercise of the purest and most sublime Virtue: Every one knows how much a calm and contented Mind contributes to the Improvement of all the good-natured, friendly, and generous Affections in us, that this is the proper Soil in which these Affections grow and flourish; it may therefore be expected that the Consideration of that equitable and impartial Judgment which God will hereafter pass upon Mankind, which tends so much to establish our Minds, when rightly disposed, in perfect Tranquillity, and to make us fully satisfied with ourselves, in every Condition, instead of contracting the Heart, and raising Habits of Selfishness in us, will rather be the means of opening and enlarging our Souls, and dispose us for all the Acts of Love and Gratitude that we are capable of towards the great Original and Author of all Good, and all the Offices of Humanity, Generosity, and Kindness to our Fellow-Creatures. To all this let us add in the last place, that the Belief of a

SERM. future Judgment may be directly a motive  
 VIII. to the most noble and worthy Actions; For  
 though, according to our first Conceptions of  
 it, and the View which the greatest part of  
 Men, perhaps always, have of it, the Con-  
 sideration of it can work only upon our selfish  
 Passions, and influence us from motives of In-  
 terest; yet if we consider the future Judg-  
 ment as a thing that will fix good Men in  
 a State, not only of the most unspeakable  
 Happiness, but of the greatest Dignity and  
 Honour, and evil Men in a State not on-  
 ly of insupportable Anguish, but of the  
 most wretched Baseness and Infamy; this  
 surely must touch some of the most ge-  
 neros Movements in our Nature, and make  
 us not only from the Desires of Honour,  
 but from a Love of Virtue itself, to adorn  
 ourselves with all amiable and worthy Qua-  
 lities, which will be the sure means of ob-  
 taining an Inheritance in that blessed State  
*wherein dwelleth Righteousness*, where there  
 will be nothing to interrupt our Progress in  
 Virtue, where the benevolent and generous  
 Affections of our Hearts may always freely  
 exert themselves, and we shall with the ut-  
 most Ease and Pleasure employ ourselves in  
 the Acts of Love and Goodness for ever-  
 more.

We



We may, therefore, upon the whole con- SERM.  
clude, that the Consideration of a future Judg- VIII.  
ment is very pertinently urged upon Men, for  
bringing them to Repentance and a Perfor-  
mance of their Duty; that this can never im-  
pair any generous or virtuous Dispositions in  
us, but that on the contrary it may frequent-  
ly prove the greatest, if not the only Sup-  
port and Security of Virtue, and is always a  
motive of universal Influence; which must  
have a great Effect, when duly attended to,  
upon Persons of all Tempers and Dispositions;  
which will make even the most Selfish en-  
deavour for the sake of their own Interest  
to acquire the virtuous Qualities, and will  
greatly animate all Men of generous Minds to  
abound in all the Fruits of Piety and Good-  
ness, which will certainly advance them to a  
State both of the greatest Happiness and the  
highest Excellence and Perfection.

To conclude: The great Business is for us  
to give way to this Motive; to maintain al-  
ways a lively Sense of the present Inspection  
of the Deity, and of his future Animadver-  
sion upon our whole Conduct; never to stifle  
our inward Conviction and Belief of the ap-  
proaching Judgment of God, but to dwell  
with pleasure on the Contemplation of this  
great

**SERMON** great Event, till we have found the Efficacy  
**VIII.** of it, for governing all our inward Motions  
 and Desires, as well as our external Behaviour.  
 I shall only add, that it will more especially concern us to make this good Improvement of the Doctrine of a future Judgment, now that Christianity has given so great a Confirmation to it, and made it much more clear and certain than it was before: To go on in our Sins, notwithstanding we have such a powerful Consideration for restraining us from them, will discover a most corrupt Disposition, which is never to be cured by any rational and human Means, and will be a Circumstance that will exceedingly aggravate our Guilt, and heighten our Condemnation.

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**SERMON**

# S E R M O N IX.

The Tendency of Christianity to promote the Happiness of Mankind in this present Life.

LUKE IX. 56.

*For the Son of Man is not come to destroy Men's Lives, but to save them.*

THE Occasion of our Saviour's making this Declaration concerning the Design of his coming into the World, was this. As he was passing through the Country of the *Samaritans*, in his way to *Jerusalem*, he sent some Messengers before him into one of their Villages, to provide an Entertainment for himself and his Attendants; but the Inhabitants knowing him to be a *Jew*, and that he was going to Worship at *Jerusalem*, from the rooted Enmity and Hatred which they had to that whole Nation, on ac-



SERM. count of some religious Differences, refused  
 IX. to receive and entertain him. This uncivil  
 and inhuman Treatment of such an excellent  
 Person, so inflamed the Spirits of *James* and  
*John*, two of our Lord's Disciples, that they  
 wanted nothing but his Consent, to inflict a  
 most severe and exemplary Punishment on the  
 Wretches who had dared to use him so un-  
 worthily and basely. *Lord, said they, wilt*  
*thou that we command Fire to come down from*  
*Heaven, and consume them, even as Elias*  
*did?* The Action of *Elijah* which is here re-  
 ferred to, is particularly related, 2 *Kings*, 1  
 Chap. But notwithstanding the Zeal which  
 the Disciples discovered in this Motion for the  
 Honour of their Master, and notwithstanding  
 they endeavoured to justify it by the Autho-  
 rity and Example of *Elijah*, our Saviour was  
 so far from approving it, that he rejected it  
 with the utmost Indignation and Abhorrence:  
*He turned quickly upon them, and rebuked*  
*them, saying, Ye know not what manner of*  
*Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not*  
*come to destroy Men's Lives, but to save them.*  
 As if he had said, " Ye do not consider what  
 " a vile and wicked Spirit that must be, which  
 " dictates so much Inhumanity and Cruelty  
 " to you, and how impossible it is for me to  
 " comply with your Proposal, since it is utter-

" ly

“ ly irreconcilable with the end of my ap-  
“ pearing in the World, which is not to do  
“ the least harm to Mankind, but on the  
“ contrary, to do them all possible good; not  
“ only to confer eternal Salvation upon them  
“ in another World, but to consult their pre-  
“ sent Welfare and Happiness in this; to  
“ establish human Society in Peace and good  
“ Order, and to contribute to the Security,  
“ Comfort, and true Enjoyment of Life.”

This every one will perceive to be our Savi-  
our's meaning, who considers that he here  
speaks of his coming to *save Men's Lives*, in  
opposition to that Destruction which his Dis-  
ciples intended to bring upon them, which  
was to have its Effect in this present World.

Now this Declaration of our Lord, deserves  
to be well considered by us, and will afford  
us some very useful Lessons and Instructions:  
But before I come to take notice of these, I  
shall first illustrate and confirm the Truth  
of what our Saviour has here asserted, or  
shew that he really came to consult the Hap-  
piness of Mankind in this present World,  
and that he has laid a very firm Foundation  
for securing and promoting it.

Before I enter upon the Proof of this Point,  
I shall make this one Observation; that it  
might very justly be expected, when our Sa-

SERM. viour appeared as a divine Messenger, and the

IX. Institutor of a Religion which was to be propagated among all Nations, that he would have a particular regard to the Peace of the World, and make the Advancement of it one principal part of his Concern. It is not to be supposed, that Almighty God, who created Men out of pure Goodness, and who preserves them in being, that he may communicate to them the Effects of his Benignity; who has made them with Capacities and Desires of Happiness in this, as well as in a future State, and has so united them together, both by the necessity of their Condition, and the social Dispositions of their Hearts, that they must mutually contribute to one another's Support and Welfare; it is not, I say, to be supposed that he would send a Person into the World, to deliver in his Name, a Law or Rule of Life to Mankind, which would take no care of them and their Interests: It may very well be presumed that such an Institution would be chiefly intended for promoting their Happiness, and that while it effectually secured their greatest and most extensive Happiness in another World, it would likewise provide for that part of it which may be enjoyed by them in this. The natural Apprehensions which we have of the Deity,



Deity, lead us very obviously to conclude **SERM.**  
that this must be the Design of every Reve- **IX.**  
lation and Institution of Religion which pro-  
ceeds from him; and indeed without this  
Design, it would not be possible for any Re-  
velation to engage the Attention and Favour  
of Mankind.

Accordingly, when our Lord appeared in  
the Character of a Prophet sent by God, he  
had this Qualification, which would be natu-  
rally expected in him, and which was neces-  
sary to his insinuating himself into the favour  
of Men, a kind and beneficent Intention: He  
soon made it appear that the Policy of this  
World was not the Spring of his Conduct;  
that he came not to promote any little selfish  
Ends and Interests of his own, but that his  
Design was noble and generous, and entirely  
friendly to Mankind; not only to prepare  
them for a state of Immortality in another  
World, and to confirm them in the joyful  
Hope of it; but to render their Condition here  
easy and agreeable, to make Pleasure to flow  
in every Heart, to diffuse a Spirit of Peace,  
Harmony, and Love through human Society,  
and to establish the World a Scene of constant  
Serenity and Delight, so far as the present  
Constitution and Order of things will permit  
it to be so. This was the true Design of our

SERM. Saviour's appearing, and the Business which he  
 IX. sincerely prosecuted while he conversed upon  
 Earth: As will fully appear from considering,

I. The Nature and Tendency of that Religion which he has instituted.

II. The Example which he has proposed to the Imitation of all his Followers.

I. Let us consider the Nature and Tendency of the Christian Institution. Whoever reflects upon this, must soon perceive it to be perfectly well calculated, for promoting the present Interest of Men, and making the Societies of the World flourish and prosper. To shew how truly Christianity is adapted to this purpose, let us consider what the things are, on which the Happiness of particular Men, and that of Society chiefly depend. It must be evident to every one upon the least Reflection, that the greatest part of his private Happiness arises from a virtuous Temper and state of Mind, and a course of Actions agreeable to it; from the Dispositions of Reverence, Love, Gratitude, and Submission to the great Author and Governour of all things, and Trust in his Providence: From Humanity, Justice, and Kindness to Men; from the Moderation of all the Appetites and Passions of the Soul, and the keeping them in subjection to the Directions of Reason and Conscience. Who

ever attends to the several Sorts of pleasant Perceptions that he enjoys, will acknowledge, if he speaks ingenuously, that the Pleasures which he receives from the Exercise of these good Dispositions and Affections, are by far the most noble and satisfying of any with which he is acquainted; that they affect him in the most lively manner, and are steady and permanent in their nature, and of constant use to support and revive him in any Misfortunes and Adversities which may happen to him in the World; besides that they are usually attended with the other most valuable Comforts and Pleasures of Life. It is likewise evident that the greatest Happiness of Society proceeds from the Virtue and good Conduct of Men; particularly from their being well-affected towards the Publick, and employing the several Talents, Powers, and Advantages which they may be possessed of, for promoting the common Good; from the Magistrates framing and executing wise and righteous Laws, and the Subjects paying a just Respect to lawful Authority, and contributing chearfully to the necessary Support of the Government and Constitution; from the Diligence and Industry of Men in the Business of an honest Calling, from their observing the Maxims of Truth, Justice,



SERM. Meekness, Compassion, and Charity, in their

**IX.** Conversation and Dealings with one another, and their performing readily all the social and relative Duties of Life. Both Reason and Experience assure us, that these are the things, from whence the publick Happiness directly and immediately flows, and that they will never fail to make a Society flourish in Prosperity and Glory. Now when this is considered, it will be very easy to shew the Tendency of the Christian Religion to promote the present Happiness of Men, and the Peace and Welfare of this World. For let any one read the Gospel with the least Attention and Impartiality, and he must needs see that the great Design and Business of it is to press and inculcate all those Virtues which are the Sources both of private and publick Happiness; that it strictly enjoins all the Branches of Piety towards God, an awful Veneration of his Majesty, strong Love and Gratitude for his Mercies, perfect Resignation to his Will, and a firm Confidence in his Power and Goodness: That it indispensably requires an exact Performance of all the Duties of Justice, Faithfulness, Compassion, and Goodness towards Men, and will not allow us to gratify our private Desires and Inclinations in any Instances to the prejudice and

and Detriment of others ; that it insists particularly upon those Duties and Virtues, the Practice of, which affects the Order and Happiness of the Publick ; requiring Magistrates to provide for the Safety and Welfare of the Communities in which they govern, by a steady and impartial Administration of Justice, and Subjects to honour and obey Magistrates as Persons set over them for their Good, and to support and assist them in the just Execution of their Offices, and in maintaining the Harmony and Order of Society ; commanding all Men to fulfil the Duties of their several Relations ; to be laborious and diligent in their Callings, that instead of being burthensome to the Community, they may have wherewithal to communicate to the Necessities of the indigent Members of it ; to be perfectly honest, true, and equitable in all their Commerce and Intercourse in the World, to cultivate a Spirit of Humanity, Meekness, Forgiveness, Condescension, and universal Benevolence ; not to confine their Good-Will to any one Party or Denomination, but *to do good, as they have Opportunity, to all* ; and to be ready to sacrifice every private Interest, even Life itself, for the common Benefit and Interest of their Brethren. This is the constant Strain and Tenor of our holy Religion ;

SERM. gion; these are the things which it incul-  
IX. cates most affectionately and earnestly upon  
us, and on which it lays the greatest stress; as-  
suring us that they are essential to true Reli-  
gion, the very Life and End of it, and the  
Marks by which we shall be known to be  
Christians; that they are the most acceptable  
Services that we can possibly offer to Almighty  
God, and far more pleasing to him than any  
of the instituted parts of his own Worship;  
and that they must be performed by us as ever  
we would answer the Obligations which the  
infinite Love of God, and of our blessed  
Saviour hath laid upon us, and as ever we  
would be entitled to the Favour of God  
and the Happiness of another World. This  
is what every one who looks into the New  
Testament, must know to be a just Account  
of the Nature and Design of the Christian  
Religion; and consequently, that it is entire-  
ly contrived for the Benefit of the World;  
that it has the plainest Tendency to promote  
the Happiness, both of every Man considered  
particularly in himself, and of all Men in  
general as united together in Society. Indeed  
the Gospel is so apparently calculated for rais-  
ing and cherishing a Spirit of universal Love  
and Goodness in Mankind; it abounds so  
much in Precepts, Exhortations, and Motives

to



to the Exercise of Patience, Temperance, Meekness, Forbearance, Forgiveness, Charity, and such Virtues as contribute most immediately and effectually to the Peace and Prosperity of the World, that some have accused it upon this very score, as if by insisting so much upon these Virtues, it dispirited and ineebled the Minds of Men, and rendered them incapable of great and heroick Actions: This Objection might certainly be shewn to stand upon a very false Foundation, were it necessary here to enter into a Confutation of it; but all that I intend by mentioning it, is only to observe that even in the Judgment of those who bear no Good-will to Christianity, it appears to be a most good-natured and benevolent Institution, which intends to calm and soften the Passions and Tempers of Men, to remove every fierce and cruel Quality out of their Nature, and to make them all mild and gentle, peaceable and kind, and to take pleasure in nothing so much as in promoting one another's Happiness.

II. It will farther appear that our Saviour designed to promote the Peace and Happiness of Mankind in this present World, from considering that Example which he has proposed

SERM. proposed to the Imitation of his Followers.

IX.

It must be evident to any one who considers the Life of our blessed Lord, as described in the History of the Gospel, that he was not only innocent and inoffensive, but most useful and beneficent in his Conversation; that he acquitted himself perfectly well as a Member of Society, and a Citizen of the World. His Behaviour was, in this respect, entirely conformable to the Doctrine which he delivered, being full of Obedience and Submission to the just Orders of the Government under which he lived, and of Justice, Meekness, Patience, Forbearance, Compassion and Charity to all Mankind: Our Saviour was particularly careful to give no offence to the governing Powers, and did indeed more than was strictly incumbent on him to approve himself a peaceable and good Subject; as is plain in the Case of his working a Miracle for the Payment of certain Tribute-Money, to which he was not liable. And as to his ordinary Conduct in Life, nothing could be more patient and forgiving, more gentle and condescending, more full of Humanity and Goodness, than it was. Though our Lord was exposed to all sorts of evil Treatment, and was more abused and injured than any Person that ever was in the World, yet he never

never discovered any thing of a malicious or revengeful Disposition; he had indeed a very lively Sense of the Indignities and Abuses which were offered to him; but he never rendered *Evil for Evil, or Railing for Railing*; on the contrary, he expressed the greatest Good-will to his Enemies, by endeavouring to correct their Tempers and reclaim them from their Wickedness, and by praying heartily to God for their Forgiveness. Though he was in such poor and mean Circumstances in the World, that it was not possible for him, in a natural and human way, to relieve the outward Distresses of the miserable Objects that he every where met with; yet he failed not to make use of his Divine Power for supplying this Deficiency, and was daily employed in working Miracles, for feeding the Hungry, for opening the Eyes of the Blind, for restoring Strength to the Lame, and a Power of hearing and speaking to the Deaf and Dumb, and for healing all sort of Sickness and Infirmities among the People: besides that he imparted more valuable Blessings than any relating to the Body, to all who attended upon him, wise Instructions, discreet and free Reproofs, and earnest Persuatives to every thing that has a Tendency to make the Mind happy both in this, and in



SERM. a future State. In these good Works our

IX. Lord continually employed himself from the time of his appearing publickly in the World; and in them he took so much delight, that not all the ungrateful usage which he met with, nor the perverse Constructions, which were put upon his most generous and useful Actions, nor all the Hatred, Rage, and Persecution which he foresaw, his persevering in his good Designs would unavoidably draw upon him, could divert him from them: Notwithstanding these great Discouragements and Hinderances to the Exercise of Benevolence, our blessed Saviour, according to the glorious Character which one of the sacred

Acts x 38. Historians gives of him, *went about doing Good, seeking for Opportunities of conferring his Benefits, and readily laying hold on all that offered. This was the Conduct of the Founder of our Religion; this is the Pattern which he has proposed to his Disciples, and which he has obliged them all to follow, telling them, that he had given*

John .xiii. *them an Example, that they should do as he*  
 13. *bad done, that they must learn of him who was*  
 Marth. xi. *meek and lowly in Heart, and that they must*  
 29. *love one another as he has loved them. And*  
 John xiii. *from hence it is most evident that our Lord*  
 34. *did truly consult the Peace and Welfare of*  
 this

this World, since he not only made the SERM.  
promoting them the constant Concern and **IX.**  
Business of his Life, but has engaged his  
Followers to make it the Business of their  
Lives also, by the Influence of his amiable  
Example.

Having thus sufficiently illustrated the  
Truth of our Saviour's Assertion, concerning  
his coming to promote the Welfare and Hap-  
piness of this World, I proceed now to draw  
some useful Lessons and Inferences from what  
has been discoursed.

1. We may see what great reason there  
is for approving and valuing the Christian  
Religion, which is so entirely calculated for  
the Benefit and Interest of the World. Great  
is the difference between the Religion of our  
Saviour, and the Religions which prevail in  
many places of the World, which instead of  
contributing to the Ease and Comfort of their  
Professors, engage them to the Observance of  
many burthensome Superstitions, and fill their  
Minds with tormenting Passions, and dis-  
quieting Fears; and which, instead of promot-  
ing the publick Good, tend to the Desolation  
of Countries, and to the introducing great  
Confusion and Misery into civil Society: This  
is too plainly the Tendency of most of the  
false Religions which are at this Day admit-  
ted

SERM. ted in the World; which consideration must

IX. certainly make these Religions the Aversion of every wise and good Man. Nothing like this

James iii.  
17.

can be objected against the Doctrine of our blessed Saviour, which is altogether *pure and peaceable*, and has the kindest Influence on all the Affairs of Mankind and of Society; which intends to subdue all those evil Appetites and Passions, from whence the greatest part both of the private Uneasinesses, and publick Confusions and Disturbances which are in the World proceed, and to form such a strong Temper of Goodness in Men, as must produce a great deal of pleasure, not only to the Persons who possess it, but to all to whom their Influence may extend; and which, if the End of it were but sincerely and universally complied with, would settle and confirm the whole World in a state of universal Justice Peace, Love, and Happiness. This is the true Design and Tendency of our Religion, which may very justly recommend it to the Approbation and Favour of the World: It is indeed unaccountable, that any who are really Friends to the Cause of Virtue, and the Interests of Mankind, should ever oppose an Institution, the great Design of which, is so evidently benevolent and useful; though the intrinsic Goodness of Christianity, is not sufficient



ficient to prove it to be properly an Institution from Heaven, yet this may, at least, incline Men to entertain a favourable Opinion of it, and to wish well to it ; this may prevent their taking up any groundless Prejudices against it, and much more their using any dishonest Arts, which yet have sometimes been used, for overthrowing it : This Consideration may rather prepossess them in favour of the Gospel, and make them wish to see the Truth and Divinity of it made out to the Conviction of every one, and to encourage all Men to receive it, and to form their Conduct according to its directions. Thus it may be thought that we shall be affected with respect to the Christian Religion, upon a bare View of its excellent Nature and beneficial Tendency : Not that we are to look upon Christianity only as a useful Scheme of Philosophy, or merely as the Institution of a Man, who intended to do good in the World ; which is all the account that some Persons are willing to make of it ; for besides its containing a most pure and benevolent Doctrine, which to a well-disposed Mind must be its great Commendation, it has moreover been confirmed by such extraordinary Works, as sufficiently declare it to be of a heavenly and divine Original. The Evidence for this, is so clear and

SERM.  
IX.

SERM. full, that it will hardly fail to satisfy all Men  
 IX. who examine it with due Attention and Impartiality, and determine them to embrace the Gospel, not only as containing wise Instructions for the good Conduct of Life, but as a Law enjoined upon them by the highest and most unquestionable Authority.

2. It follows from what has been said, that the Confusions and Mischiefs which Christianity has occasioned in the World, and the ambitious and factious Designs which have been carried on under the Cover of it, are not to be charged as natural Consequences from it, or any Principle which it contains. It is certain, that the holy and benevolent Institution of the Gospel, has not universally produced its true and proper Effects in the Minds of Men : It is far from having been always the means of subduing the Fierceness of their Tempers, of reconciling their Differences, and uniting them in the Bonds of Friendship, Charity, and Peace : It has often proved, on the contrary, the occasion of the bitterest Hatreds and Animosities, and of filling the World with all the deadly Effects of Party-Rage, Violence, and Cruelty. It would be an unnecessary, as it is an ungrateful Work, to reckon up the Persecutions and Barbarities, even of Christians against Christians, upon pretence

pretence of defending their common Religion, SERM.  
IX.  
or something which has been thought to relate to it; many Instances of which have been extremely horrid and shocking, not only inconsistent with the most obvious Design of the Gospel, but with all the Principles of natural Justice and Humanity. These are things which are very well known, both to the Friends and Adversaries of the Christian Religion; and indeed there are too many Instances of them to be observed in almost every Country, where this Religion is professed at this very day. It was with respect to these Events, that our Lord declared that he *came* Matth. x:  
34.  
*not to send Peace upon earth, but a Sword*; that is, that the consequence of his appearing in the World, would not be the Establishment of that universal Quiet and Harmony, which his Religion was intended to introduce; but that this very Religion, which is so meek and charitable, would often, by the perverse Humours and Passions of Mankind, be turned into an Engine of the greatest Strifes, Divisions, and Cruelties. But whatever the Distractions and Miseries which have happened in the World upon occasion of Christianity's coming into it may have been, it is certain, that the Guilt of them can never justly be fixed upon it; they are none of its Fruits or  
S 2                      Productions,



SERM. Productions, nor is it any more to be blamed

IX. for them, than Philosophy, Civil Government, or any of the most wise and useful Institutions of Men, are to be blamed for the Evils, to which, contrary to their own Design and Tendency, they have been made subservient. If there was any thing in the nature of the Christian Institution which led to Confusion, or to disturb and imbroil Mankind, it would be meet that it should bear the Reproach of it; but when nothing like this can be pretended, when just the reverse of it is true, when every thing in the Gospel conspires most evidently to the general Peace and Happiness of the World, surely none who judge equitably, and as they would judge in Cases exactly parallel, will ever condemn the Religion of our Saviour, only for its being used as a Cover to such Persecutions, Cruelties, and Inhumanities, as are utterly repugnant to the whole Nature and Design of it. With those who thoroughly consider things, it will perhaps be an Argument in favour of the Gospel, that Men have been always so willing to draw it in, for sheltering Designs which they knew they could not well accomplish without the Influence of its Name and Authority; but none can justly accuse it, only because it has been abused, and made the Instrument of promoting

ting Projects, which above all things it con-  
demns and abhors.

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3. From what has been discoursed, we may learn how utterly irreconcilable with Christianity all those Doctrines and Principles are, which are prejudicial to the Interests of Mankind, which tend either to destroy, or lessen the Happiness of human Society. And of this sort of Doctrines there have been, and are too many received among almost all Professions of Christians, and more especially among those of the Church of *Rome*, to the great reproach of the Gospel, and infinite prejudice and harm of the World. Such, for instance, is the Doctrine which teaches Men, under the Notion of following a stricter Course of Piety, and leading a more sublime and spiritual Life, to withdraw from the World, and all the common Concerns of Life, and to give themselves up entirely to the Exercises of Meditation, Reading, and Devotion; the Consequence of which has been the rendering vast multitudes of People, not only insignificant, and useless, but very expensive and burthensome to Society. Of the same kind more notoriously is the Doctrine of propagating Religion by external Force, which has been often put in practice, not only to the laying some negative

SERM. Discouragements and smaller Hardships upon

IX. Men, but to the subversion of all their most important Privileges and Rights; to the Violation of all the Order and Peace of the Publick, to the committing of the most horrid Outrages and Cruelties, and the turning whole Countries into *Fields of Blood*. And of the same nature and tendency are the Doctrines concerning the Supremacy of the *Pope*, and the Privileges which belong to him even in the highest Temporal Matters, the *deposing of Princes, the giving away their Dominions, and absolving Subjects from their Allegiance*; and the spiritual Powers which he and other Ecclesiastical Persons have pretended to, of *shutting up and opening the Kingdom of Heaven, of binding and loosing, and of retaining and remitting Sins Authoritatively*; which, according to their genuine and true Meaning, amount to nothing less than the putting Men into a State of Salvation, or Damnation, as they please: Which Doctrines have likewise been the Source of great Commotions, Confusions, and Calamities in many Nations. These pernicious Tenets are quite the reverse of the righteous and merciful Principles of the Gospel, and so far as they take effect, entirely destructive of the Design of it: Nothing therefore can be more grossly absurd and shamefully



shamefully inexcusable, than for any to embrace and act agreeably to such Doctrines, and at the same time to make a Profession of the Christian Religion. The Persons who do this, may pretend, if they please, a more than ordinary Zeal for Religion; or they may appropriate it to themselves, and allow no share of it to any others, which is what they of the Church of *Rome* do; but while they act in such direct opposition to the great and evident Design of the Gospel, every one of the least Consideration must see the vile Hypocrisy and Impudence of their Pretences, and that the Spirit which really actuates them, is as different as can be from any thing which could be infused into them by Christianity.

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4. Lastly, From what has been said, we may see how much it should be the Concern and Business of every one of us to promote the Happiness of our Fellow-Creatures, and to do good in the World. This is a thing which the Instincts and Suggestions of Nature incline us to, and it is what Religion most firmly binds upon us: Indeed the only way of approving ourselves sincere and good Christians, is to cultivate a Temper of universal Justice, Meekness, and Benevolence,

SERM. and to lay out ourselves to be as useful as our

IX. Capacities and Stations will admit of. There  
 are some, I know, who imagine that they can sufficiently discharge the Obligations, which Religion lays upon them with respect to Mankind, by being barely just and honest, and abstaining from all positive Wrongs and Injuries; or that they can, perhaps, attain to the End of Religion, without practising any moral and social Virtues at all, looking upon certain Points of Faith, and a great Zeal in defending these, and a punctual Attendance upon the external Forms and Institutions of Devotion, as the only things of moment, and as the very Height and Perfection of Christianity. But these are such gross Mistakes, that it is hardly to be supposed that Men can fall into them, without at least a very criminal Negligence and Inattention. According to the most obvious Notions, which both Reason and Revelation give us of Religion, it is intended for the Benefit of the World, for making Mankind live so, as to be both happy in themselves, and kind and beneficent to one another; and this Effect it will certainly produce in us, if we duely attend to it, and are governed by its Authority.

SERMON

# S E R M O N X.

The Loving our Saviour above all  
the Objects of our Affection in  
this World.

MATTH. X. 37, 38.

*He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me: And he that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me: And he that taketh not his Cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

**I**N this Chapter we have an account of our Saviour's sending out his Apostles to publish and preach his Religion to the World, with the Instructions and Directions which he gave them upon that occasion. He first informs them who the Persons were, to whom he intended they should  
address



SER M. address themselves; and what Message they

X. should deliver, and how that was to be supported and confirmed. He afterwards proceeds to advise them as to the proper Methods of conducting themselves in the prosecution of the great Design upon which he sent them. He lets them know that his Religion would by no means meet with an easy and ready Acceptance from Mankind; that notwithstanding its intrinsick Excellence, and *the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power of God*, which would accompany it, such would be the Prejudices and Corruptions of the World, that Men would very generally reject it, and that they would not content themselves barely with rejecting it, but would raise storms of Persecution against them who preached it, and all who took upon them the Profession of it: That therefore it would be very necessary for them, and all who should call themselves his Disciples, to act with great Prudence and Integrity; not to run unnecessarily into danger; but when that became unavoidable, to arm themselves with Patience and Resolution to adhere to their Religion against all Opposition; not to suffer their Constancy in the Profession of the Gospel, to be shaken either by the Threatnings and Terrors of Men in Power, or by the Entreaties or Frowns

of

of their Kindred and Relations, whom they S E R M.  
would often find in the number of their X.  
Enemies and Persecutors; to have such an  
ardent Love of him prevailing in their Hearts,  
as would be superior to every Passion and  
Affection in them which terminated in Men,  
and overcome both their Fear and Love of  
all Persons and Things upon earth; as would  
exceed the Reverence and Gratitude which  
they owed to their Parents, and all the ten-  
derest Motions which they felt towards their  
Children; as would dispose them to relinquish  
all the Satisfaction and Enjoyment which they  
had in the Society and Friendship of these  
dear Relations, to alienate themselves from  
them, to submit to their Displeasure, and  
to every Indignity and Calamity that could  
possibly befall them in Life, rather than de-  
sert his Cause and renounce his Religion.  
If this was not their Temper, he assures  
them, in the Words which I have read to  
you, that they would never be accounted his  
worthy Disciples.

But though the immediate View of our  
Saviour in this passage was to recommend to  
his Disciples such a strong Love of himself,  
as would insure their steadiness in the Pro-  
fession of Christianity, when they were under  
most powerful Temptations from the Regard

SER.M. and Affection which they naturally had to  
 XX their Families and Friends, from a Love of  
 Life, and from an Aversion to Torments and  
 Death, to abandon it; yet there is no ne-  
 cessity for confining his Meaning to this par-  
 ticular Case. We may very well understand  
 his Words in a greater latitude, as requiring  
 from us such a constant lively Regard to him,  
 such an habitual and fixed Temper of intense  
 Love to his Religion and Laws, as will in all  
 Cases and Circumstances prevail above our At-  
 tachments to our dearest Relations and Friends,  
 and all our Desires of private Ease and Plea-  
 sure; as will not only in times of Persecu-  
 tion make us firm and resolute in *confessing him*  
*before Men*, but in the ordinary state of things  
 determine us to prefer our Duty to him to all  
 Considerations in the World, and make us  
 more zealous in performing that, than we are  
 in pleasing those whom we may most esteem  
 and value upon earth, and whose Happi-  
 ness we may desire as much as our own;  
 and than we are in procuring to ourselves any  
 Advantages or Pleasures that may be agree-  
 able to our Inclinations, or even the things  
 that may be most necessary for the Preserva-  
 tion and Support of our Lives. This habi-  
 tually prevailing Love of our Saviour above  
 all the dearest Object of our Affection in this  
 World,



World; may be justly supposed to be included in what he requires from his Disciples in the Text; because if we are to love him above all things upon earth, when it is most hazardous and difficult to do so, it may certainly be expected that we shall love him in this manner in Cases of less danger and difficulty; and because it is necessary that a Love of him and his Religion, should, not only in times of Persecution, but in all other times, have a more powerful Influence in our Hearts, than our Love of any worldly Objects, in order to our being accounted his true Disciples.

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I doubt not but that this Commandment of our Lord will come into the number of those *hard Sayings*, which Men of prejudiced and depraved Minds are always ready to object to the Gospel. What a high Strain, what an extravagant Demand, will such be apt to say, have we here? Will nothing less suffice the purpose of Christianity, than our being always prepared to part with Life and all its Enjoyments, to submit contentedly to Death and all the Miseries which Men can bring upon us, when it shall be thought that the Interest of the Gospel makes it necessary for us to do so? Must we be ever keeping a strict guard over our Appetites and Inclinations, and contradict and restrain them, however strong and violent

SERM. violent they may be, when they would car-

X.  ry us to any thing contrary to the Will of *Jesus Christ*? Must we, to approve ourselves his Disciples, not only deny ourselves many private Indulgences and Gratifications, but frequently offer Violence to the generous and tender Affections of our Hearts, break through the Respect and Duty which we owe to Parents, and neglect the Interest of our Offspring, for whose Happiness we naturally have the most sensible Concern, whenever there seems to be a Competition between our pleasing and doing good to them, and our observing any rigid Maxims of the Christian Institution? Must the Affection which we bear to those Persons to whom Nature has most closely allied and united us, be always in a lower degree than our love of the Author of Christianity, and must we limit our regards to them, and all the other sensible and most attractive Objects of the World, by the Declarations and Appointments of him our invisible Governor? This, they will say, is a very hard Task to be put upon Men, and a thing altogether disproportioned to their Nature; which therefore it cannot be imagined that they are under any Obligation to submit to.

In this manner, it may be expected, that Sinners will be ready to argue against this

Law

Law of our Saviour's Religion, and endeavour by such Surmises and Objections to justify or excuse themselves in not submitting to his righteous and gentle Government: It may therefore be necessary to vindicate this Precept of Christianity against such Suggestions of prejudiced and corrupted Men, or to shew that our Saviour in requiring a Love of himself, which shall be always superior to our Love both of Parents and Children, to our Love of Life and every thing that is most dear to us upon Earth, has required nothing unreasonable or unnatural from us, nothing but what he has a clear right to, and may be easily complied with by us. This I shall first endeavour to do, and then make some useful Reflections upon this Subject.

For shewing the Equity and Reasonableness of this part of the Gospel-Constitution, or that our Saviour has here required nothing from us but what he is most justly entitled to, we must reflect a little in general upon the Order in which our Affections operate towards their several Objects, and upon what foundation we approve of higher Degrees of Good-will and Love to some of these Objects, than we give and allow to others of them.

It is plain that our Nature is formed both with selfish and generous Affections, the first  
of

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X.

of which have for their Object our own Happiness, and the latter the Happiness of other rational Agents. The Indulgence of our selfish Affections so far as it is necessary for the support of our Beings, and the preserving us always in the best Capacity for performing the Offices which we owe to God and our Neighbour, is strictly our Duty; and the Gratification of them in all other Instances in which they can be gratified without our offending against the Laws of God, and without our prejudicing or neglecting the Interests of Society and of Mankind, and of any particular Persons whom Nature and Providence may have put more immediately under our Care, is perfectly innocent and allowable. But if our selfish Dispositions should prevail so far, as to make us, for procuring the means of their Gratification, to break through the Duty which we owe to God, and to violate the Rights and disturb the Peace of Men; or if they should not make us positively and directly injurious, if they made us only hard-hearted and uncharitable, shut our Ears against the Calls of Distress, and tied up our Hand from affording the Relief which we may very well spare to the Miserable; if they should contract us altogether into ourselves, and confine our Cares to our own little Con-

cerns,

cerns, and render us quite indifferent to the SERM.  
Happiness of the World, and the Prosperity X.  
of our Relations and Acquaintance; if they  
should destroy all social Feelings in us, and  
become the sole actuating Principles of our  
Life; our Conduct would certainly be ac-  
knowledgeed by all who had any Notion of  
moral Obligations, and of the Difference of  
Virtue from Vice, to be exceedingly base and  
criminal. It is necessary that our generous  
and benevolent Affections operate in some  
Degree, and indeed that they bear a certain  
Proportion to the Capacities and Abilities of  
our Nature, and to our external Advantages  
for doing good, in order to our acting a part  
in Life that will be accounted barely innocent:  
And if we would aspire to that Perfection in  
Virtue which our Consciences recommend,  
and entitle ourselves to any high Degree of  
the Approbation and Favour of God or Man,  
we must carefully cherish and cultivate these  
Affections, give way to their Impulses, and  
pursue their Bent and Tendency, under the  
direction of the superior Faculties of the  
Mind, in our whole Conversation. It is per-  
haps impossible to say how far a Man may be  
obliged to proceed in the Exercise of his Ge-  
nerosity and Benevolence in every particular  
Case: But it is easy to see that certain bene-

SERM. volent Affections must be always exerted by

X. us, if we would either obtain the Approbation of our own Minds, or answer the End of our Creator in endowing us with our present Powers and Dispositions, or maintain a tolerable Character in the World. Of this sort is a Tendernefs to our Children and Offspring, to whom we are attached not only by that general Benevolence which binds us to all Mankind, but by a strict and particular Determination of Nature: Of the same kind is the Love of our Parents, to whom we are likewise united by a particular Tie of Nature, as well as the Consideration of the Benefits which we have received from them in the course of our Education. And such likewise is Gratitude to Benefactors in general, which is a thing very deeply laid in our Hearts, and one of the most universally prevailing Dispositions that is found among Men. All these kind and friendly Affections are so essential to our Nature, and have such a strong Foundation in it, that if any one should attempt to root them out or suppress them, he would look like a Monster, who must be disagreeable to himself if ever he took a serious View of his own Temper, as he would certainly be hateful to other intelligent and moral Agents. And yet natural and strong as these

good



good Dispositions are, there are other generous Affections which must be stronger in us and always prevail above them, as well as above every Desire and Affection that terminates purely in ourselves. Such is the Love of our Country, or of that particular Community or civil Society to which we belong, and the Love of Mankind in general: Though these generous Affections do not appear so early in us, as some of those which have been already mentioned, yet they unavoidably arise with great force in our Hearts, as our Minds open and enlarge themselves, and come to take in Ideas of the Constitutions, Laws, and Privileges of Societies, and of the common Rights, Liberties, and Interests of Men: And it is certain that they always appear to our Conscience, or the moral Judgment of our Minds, as more noble and excellent Dispositions, and more deserving our Cultivation than any Regard to ourselves, and than any particular good Affections which are more limited and confined as to their Objects than they are. Such likewise is our Affection to any Persons of eminently virtuous Characters, and who are of great Importance and Usefulness to the World; we being prompted both from an Admiration and Love of Virtue, and from a publick Spirit to esteem and love such more

S E R M.  
X.

SERM. highly than those who are by Nature most  
 X. nearly related to us, but who do not appear  
 to be so worthy, and of so much consequence  
 to Mankind. And such more especially is  
 our Love of that great Being, whose Character  
 is the proper Standard of all admirable and lovely  
 Qualities, and who is the inexhaustible Foun-  
 tain of all Goodness; who has laid the great-  
 est Obligations upon every Man, and is al-  
 ways in the wisest manner promoting the ge-  
 neral Happiness of the whole Creation. He,  
 certainly, according to the most natural Sug-  
 gestions of our Consciences, and according to  
 all our Notions of Generosity and Gratitude,  
 is always to have an unrivalled Degree of our  
 Affection, to be loved by us with the great-  
 est Earnestness and Strength of Heart, vastly  
 more than any other Object, than Life,  
 Country, Friends, Possessions, and all the  
 Enjoyments that we can possibly have in the  
 World.

Now from this general View of the Order  
 in which our Affections operate towards their  
 respective Objects, we may easily discern the  
 Equity of this Precept of the Gospel, and  
 that our Saviour is most justly entitled to a  
 degree of our Affection superior to our At-  
 tachment to our dearest Friends, stronger than  
 our Love of Life, Ease, and Pleasure, and

all the Advantages which the World is capable of affording us. For if we consider the transcendent Dignity of his Character, and his infinite Benevolence to Mankind; that he is *the only-begotten of the Father, the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person; that by him all things were created, and by him they all consist*; that notwithstanding his incomprehensible Dignity and Glory, he condescended at the time determined by the Wisdom of God, and when the Circumstances of Mankind rendered such an extraordinary Appearance highly expedient, to assume our Nature and to be born into the World, that he might *deliver us from our Sins, and be the Author of our Salvation*; or, in other words, that he might rescue us from a most deplorable State of Corruption, Guilt, and Misery, and that he might purify and exalt our Nature, and confer on us the greatest and most lasting Happiness: That in order to this, he became the living Oracle of God to Mankind, who revived and restored the great Doctrines and Principles of Religion which had been most unhappily obscured and corrupted, and added a much greater Force and Weight to them than ever they had before; that he was likewise our great High-Priest, who *shed his Blood for the Remission*

SERM,

X.

John i. 14.

Heb. i. 3.

Col. i. 16.

17.

Matth.

of xxvi. 28.



SERM. of our Sins, and put them away by the Sacri-

X. *fice of himself*; and that he is a King who  
 Heb. xi. rules in Righteousness, who governs us by  
 25. the most equitable and gracious Laws, who  
 protects and supports his faithful Subjects by  
 an invisible Providence, and the Influence of  
 his Spirit, and will continue to do so, till he  
 Joh. xi. *gathers together in one, the Children of God,*  
 52. *who are scattered abroad*, and establishes them  
 all in a State of unchangeable Perfection and  
 Happiness in the everlasting Kingdom of his  
 Father: That in all this great Transaction, he  
 discovered such an ardent Desire of the Hap-  
 piness of Mankind, as was not to be extin-  
 guished or abated by the most discouraging  
 Considerations; not by the Unworthiness of  
 those who were the Objects of his Compassion;  
 not by the Thoughts of eclipsing his divine  
 Glory, of obscuring and diminishing himself,  
 and living in a very mean and humble Con-  
 dition, as to external appearance, in this World;  
 not by the Prospect of being exposed to the  
 Contempt of Men, and *the Contradiction of*  
*Sinners*, of meeting often with very ungrate-  
 ful Usage from his Friends, and falling under  
 the most bitter Persecutions of his Ene-  
 mies, and submitting at last to a most ig-  
 nominous and painful Death; that in oppo-  
 sition to all these Discouragements, which  
 would

would have damped or borne down any ordinary Charity, our Saviour resolutely and immoveably persevered in his Design of saving Sinners, till he fully compleated and accomplished it : If we consider all this, can there be the least hesitation in pronouncing him incomparably more deserving of our Regard and Love, than the Men whom we most highly esteem, than our nearest Relations and our greatest Benefactors upon earth ; the very best of whom must ever fall infinitely short of him, both as to their inherent Worth and Perfection, and the Expressions of their Goodness and Kindness to us ? Can we be at any loss to see that we should immoveably adhere to his Religion, and obey his Laws, even at the hazard of displeasing Friends, of incurring the hatred of the World, and drawing upon ourselves the most grievous Persecution and Distress ? If we really believe the account which the Gospel gives of *Jesus Christ*, and his interposition for the Salvation of Sinners, and if we have withal any generous Sense of Things, any Principles of Ingenuity and Gratitude in our Nature ; it is impossible but that we must be always ready to abandon Country, Relations, Houses, Lands, and all temporal Interests and Enjoyments, and to submit to any Sufferings, rather than

SERM.  
X.  
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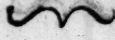
SERM. desert the Cause, or act inconsistently with  
 X. the Will of so excellent and worthy a Being;  
 and must think, that all that we can do for  
 his honour, will be but a small acknowledgement  
 for his most surprizing Condescension,  
 and his unbounded Generosity and Love of  
 Mankind. This prevailing Love of our Blef-  
 sed Saviour, this superior Regard which we  
 are to express to him, above what we express  
 to any Persons or Things in this World, is so  
 far from being unnatural, or a thing that is to  
 be complained of, as Men of prejudiced and  
 vicious Minds are apt to represent it, that it  
 is indeed the Result of the natural Course  
 of our Affections, and of their operating ac-  
 cording to the Direction of the supreme and  
 commanding Faculty in the Mind; it is a  
 Disposition which none who call themselves  
 Christians can want, without being conscious,  
 if they ever calmly reflect on themselves, of  
 great baseness of Heart, and which, it may  
 be expected, we should be careful to cultivate  
 out of mere Generosity, though we had no  
 prospect of such Satisfaction and Advantages  
 from it, as it will really afford to ourselves.

But for removing all Appearance of Diffi-  
 culty, and making our Duty and our Interest  
 perfectly to agree in this matter, and that we  
 may be excited even from a regard to our  
 own



own Happiness, to cherish and improve in SERM.  
ourselves a Temper of Love to our Blessed X.  
Saviour, he himself has assured us, that no   
Instance or Expressien of that Love which he  
requires from us, will ever go without a full  
Reward; that for all the Mortifications and  
Self-denials that we must submit to in the  
Course of our Christian Obedience, for all  
the Losses that we must sustain, and for all  
the Sufferings that we must at any time un-  
dergo *for his Sake and the Gospel's, we shall re-* Mark. x.  
*ceive an hundred-fold now in this time, in an* <sup>30.</sup>  
inexpressible Peace and Joy of Heart, and  
in the most delightful Hope of the Favour of  
God, which will naturally spring up in us  
from our unshaken Firmness in the Cause  
of Truth and Righteousness, and the Consci-  
ousness of a Virtue that is superior to all  
Temptations; *and in the World to come, Life*  
*everlasting.* For this we have his express  
Declaration and Promise. And if we can  
depend on these, can any one of us speak of  
Grievances or Hardships in any Duties which  
the Love of our Saviour may constrain and  
prompt us to? Must not the Consideration of  
that inconceivable Happiness and Glory, with  
which our faithful Services to him will be  
rewarded and crowned, effectually prevent all  
the Opposition that might be apprehended  
from

SERM. from our selfish Passions, in the Exercise of

X.  our kind and grateful Affections towards him, and make way for their most free and easy Operations? Must not even those who are least apt to be influenced by the Motions of Generosity and Gratitude, and are most remarkably attached to their own Interest, be from hence put upon cultivating, by all proper Means, a prevailing Disposition of Love to our blessed Lord, since this is evidently the best Method of securing and increasing their own Felicity?

It remains now that I make a few Reflections upon what has been discoursed.

I. We may see how preposterous and unreasonable those Schemes of Religion and Christianity are, which lay the greatest stress upon the Practice of Justice, Humanity, and the relative Duties which Men owe to one another, and Sobriety and Regularity in our private Deportment, and make but little or no account of the Love of God, and of our Saviour. This is an Error that is to be charged on some of the greatest Pretenders to a cool and rational way of thinking in Matters of Religion, who from an Aversion to the Extravagancies and Follies which they may have observed in the Discourses of My-

*sticks*

*sicks* and *Enthusiasts*, concerning the Love of SERM.  
God and the Lord *Jesus Christ*, have gone X.  
into the other Extreme, of representing an in-  
ward Affection to the *Deity*, and a prevailing  
Regard to *Jesus Christ*, as things that we are  
to be but little concerned about, putting no  
Value upon them, or speaking very meanly  
of them, in comparison of our acting a so-  
cial and honourable part in regard of Man-  
kind, of conducting ourselves according to  
the Rules of Honesty, Truth, Friendship,  
and Temperance in our Conversation in the  
World, of being inoffensive to all, and as kind  
and useful as our Stations and Abilities will al-  
low us to be. But this is to present us  
either with a very defective Scheme of Reli-  
gion and Morality, or with one that is very  
irregular and confused, in which things are  
quite misplaced, and the Order of them is  
plainly inverted. The Virtues of Justice and  
Charity, and the Duties which Men owe to  
one another in their relative Capacities, and  
the Moderation of our private Appetites and  
Passions are undoubtedly things of great Ex-  
cellence and Importance, of immutable Ob-  
ligation, and essential parts of true Religion.  
But surely the Love of Almighty God, and  
the Love of our blessed Saviour, are things  
which have as much intrinsic Excellence  
and



SERM. and Worth as any of them ; and if we con-

X.  sider the exciting Causes of these Affections, and the Foundations upon which they stand, which are the supreme and perfect Goodness of the Divine Nature, the inconceivable Dignity of *Jesus Christ*, and the great and innumerable Benefits, which we and all Mankind have received from the great God and *Father of all*, and his *only-begotten Son*, they, of all the good Dispositions of which we are capable, must appear to be the most natural to us, and the most necessary and essential Ingredients in a virtuous Character. We cannot indeed be defective in any eminent Branch of Morality, without violating our Nature, and forfeiting a Character of Goodness ; but least of all can we, without doing so, be deficient in a sincere Veneration and Love of God, and a hearty Regard to *Jesus Christ*, to which we have the strongest Obligations and Inducements, and which are evidently the highest and noblest parts of all Virtue and Religion. Nor can the thinking thus of the Love of God and of our Blessed Saviour, ever tend to the prejudice of any of the social Virtues and moral Duties of Life, with Persons of the least Reflection : On the contrary, it is plain that the higher Notions we have of the Necessity of an ardent

Love

Love of the *Deity*, and of a strong Regard S E R M.  
to *Jesus Christ*, and the more active we are X.  
in expressing our Love and Respect to them,  
the more we must abound in all Justice,  
Truth, Meekness, Charity, Purity, Tempe-  
rance, and every moral Duty; since if we  
consider things with any Care, we must ea-  
sily see that our Love of these great and blef-  
sed Beings, can appear in nothing so much as  
in imitating their Nature and doing their  
Will, in which the Practice of all social and  
moral Duties is necessarily comprehended. So  
that the Principles of the Love of *God*, and  
of our Blessed Lord, are so far from subverting  
or weakning the Obligations we are natu-  
rally under to social Virtue and Sobriety of  
Life, that they add a great Support and  
Strength to them: And nothing can be more  
weak than to endeavour to explode the Doc-  
trine of the Love of *God*, and of our Saviour,  
because it has sometimes been so explained,  
as to take away the Necessity of a virtuous  
Life, and to resolve all Religion and Good-  
ness into an unactive State of high Contem-  
plation and inward Extasy and Rapture, or  
into a great Zeal for the Faith, and a scrupu-  
lous Attendance on the external Performan-  
ces of Devotion. The only thing reasonable  
in this Case, is to correct and remove the  
Mistakes

SERM. Mistakes of Men upon this Subject, without detracting from the Necessity and Value of the highest Reverence and Love of God, and of *Jesus Christ*, which are the most noble and important Principles of the Religion of Christians, and which if we have a true Notion of them, will always have a great Influence to determine and engage us to every part of our Duty.

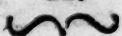
2. We may here take notice of the Purity and Sublimity of the Christian Scheme of Morals. This indeed recommends and enjoins the practice of every Virtue; it requires us to have, and even to excel in all good Qualities: But it inculcates more especially the most amiable of all virtuous Principles and Affections, a pure and diffusive Benevolence, which, according to the Plan of the Gospel, is to be the animating Spirit of human Society, disposing all Men most cheerfully to perform the Duties and kind Offices which they owe to one another, in their several Relations, and according to the various Degrees of Amiableness, which are to be found in them; and which extending beyond our own Species, must unite us to the whole Community of rational Agents, chiefly to him who is the great Head and Father of it, making us with the utmost Admiration



miration and Delight to contemplate the Per-  
fection of Goodness and Beauty in the Su-  
preme Mind, to imitate the Excellencies,  
and to resign ourselves most contentedly and  
entirely to the Pleasure and Will of God ;  
and which, next to the Supreme Being, must  
unite us to *Jesus Christ, the Image of the in-  
visible God*, and the voluntary Minister of  
the most illustrious Dispensations of the Di-  
vine Mercy and Grace to Mankind, making  
us ever true to his Cause, steady in the Pro-  
fession of his Religion, and constant and uni-  
form in our Obedience to him against all Op-  
position, and the most powerful Temptations  
to the contrary. Is not this a most noble  
Scheme ? Can we conceive of a higher  
Exaltation and greater Improvement of the  
human Faculties and Affections than they  
will receive in the Exercise of that Benevo-  
lence which the Gospel requires ? Will not,  
particularly, the Love of *God*, and the Love  
of *Jesus Christ*, if exerted in the manner  
prescribed by Christianity, most effectually  
purify and adorn our Nature, raise us not  
only above every thing that is base and cor-  
rupt, but every thing that is any way mean  
and low, inspire us with the most worthy  
and generous Views, and enliven and in-  
vigorate every good Principle and Disposition  
in

SERM.

X.



SERM. in us? Certainly if the Love of these glorious and blessed Beings did thoroughly possess and habitually govern us, we should be both as amiable and happy Creatures as it is possible for us in this World to be. To such a noble Sublimity, to such a great Height of Perfection will our Religion advance us, if we live under its Influence, and act according to its Directions: And from hence we have a clear and solid Proof of the great Merit of Christianity, and of its being most justly entitled to the Respect and Favour of the World. For who that has any Sense of Generosity and Humanity, will not value and love an Institution which contributes so effectually to the Perfection and Happiness of the human Nature? The Consideration of the intrinsic Goodness of the Gospel must certainly recommend it greatly to every honest and good Mind, even abstracting from the external Evidences of its Truth and Divinity.

3. From what has been discoursed, we may see how few of those who make Profession of Christianity, are possessed with the true Spirit of it. The Spirit of the Gospel is a Spirit of universal Goodness and Love, particularly of a strong Love to Almighty God and our Lord *Jesus Christ*, which must habitually influence our Conduct, and which of all Affections must have the greatest Force in our

our Hearts? But alas! How little of this is to be observed in the greatest part of those who call themselves Christians? Where is that profound Reverence of the Supreme Being, that absolute Submission of Soul to his Will, and that earnest Endeavour to improve in all God-like Perfections, which might be expected in the Men, in whom the Love of the *Deity* bore the greatest Sway? Where is that habitual Regard to the Authority of *Jesus Christ*, and that universal Obedience to his Laws, that lively Zeal to promote his Cause and Kingdom among Men, and that Spirit of Martyrdom to endure any Hardships and Sufferings rather than to desert or bring the least Reproach by any part of our Behaviour upon the Gospel, which are the natural Consequences of loving our Saviour above all the Objects of our Affections in this World? In how small a number of professed Christians do these things consistently and uniformly appear? Are not many of them, on the contrary, chargeable with a great deal of open Profaneness, with an habitual Inattention to the *Deity*, and Disregard to the most rational and necessary Duties of Divine Worship? Are not indeed the generality of them very cold and lifeless in all Affairs and Designs relating to the Interest of pure Christianity, while they are sufficiently warm



SERM. and eager in the Pursuit of Pleasures and secular Advantages? Is it not evident that great numbers of them are so far from being prepared to go through a Scene of Persecution, to sacrifice Life and all that is reasonably most dear to them upon Earth, for the Maintenance and Defence of the Gospel, and from keeping their Desires of the innocent Enjoyments of this World always in a subordination to the Love of *Jesus Christ* and his Religion, that they will not even part with their Lusts and vile Affections in obedience to the Commands of our Saviour, but will cherish and indulge these in defiance of his Authority, and his most solemn Denunciations of the Wrath of God against all who do so? This is too plainly the Case of the present Generation of Christians; and it must certainly be a melancholy Reflection to every Man of a serious and good Mind, to see the Professors of the Gospel so greatly and so universally corrupted, and fallen off from the true Spirit of their Religion; to perceive that *Love* of the noblest kind *has waxed cold in so many* of them; that they are so commonly *Lovers of Pleasures* and their Interests in this World, *more than Lovers of God*; that they almost *all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

These

Matth.  
xxiv. 12.

2 Tim. iii.

Phil. ii. 21.

These things are assigned in the New Testament, and very justly, as the Marks and Characteristicks of the worst and most dangerous times; and though there has been always more or less of them since the beginning of Christianity, yet perhaps there was never greater Reason to complain of the prevalency of them than in this Age; which, with all its boasted Refinements in other matters, has been far from improving in those Qualities which chiefly form the Characters of true Christians, and good Men. May God prevent the Progress and Increase of our Degeneracy, which if it goes on, must necessarily have the most fatal Influence on pure Religion, and, together with that, on every thing that is valuable and dear to us as Men.

4. From hence, in the last place, we may learn the Necessity of cultivating the Love of God and of our Blessed Saviour. This is so clear an Inference from all that went before, that there is no occasion for using any Words to illustrate it. I shall only observe, that as Almighty God never can, and as our Blessed Lord does not now come within the notice of our external Senses, and as we are continually surrounded with many Objects of these Senses, which are found in

SERM. Experience to have great force in soliciting  
 X. and engrossing our Affections, it will be very  
 necessary for counterballancing and taking off  
 the dangerous Influence of such external Objects, and for raising and heightening our Love of these most glorious and excellent, tho' they are both at present invisible Beings, to make their Perfections present to our Minds by serious and frequent Reflections; to dwell on the Consideration of all the amiable Attributes of the *Deity*, and more especially of his Goodness, which gave being to the Universe, and is still the Support and Life of it, and the Spring of all the Joy and Happiness which Mankind do or can partake of; and to contemplate the Glory of *Jesus Christ*, as it is revealed to us in the Gospel; to consider him as superior in the Dignity and Excellence of his Nature to the whole Creation, and to meditate on all the amazing Instances of his Condescension and Humility, and of his Compassion and Goodwill to Mankind. The going over these things frequently, not only in the solemn and stated Acts of our Devotion, but in many Reflections and Meditations upon other Occasions, as it seems to be altogether necessary to prevent our Affections from settling too intensely on earthly things, and to keep



keep our Hearts always open to the Impres- SERM.  
sions of the Love of God and of our Saviour, X.  
so it can hardly fail to fill us with such a high  
Respect to them, and such an ardent Love  
of them, as will make us perfectly devoted  
to them, and have a good Effect upon, and  
add a Dignity to our whole Behaviour.

The peculiar Advantages of our  
Saviour's Doctrine.

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SERMON

U 3

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# SERMON XI.

## The peculiar Advantages of our SAVIOUR'S Doctrine.

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JOHN VII. 46.

*Never Man spake like this Man.*

THESE Words were spoken of our Blessed Saviour by certain Officers, who had been sent by the *Pharisees* and *Chief Priests* of the *Jews* to apprehend him; but who, upon conversing with our Lord, and hearing some part of his Doctrine, not only desisted from all Attempts against him, but returned to their Masters, with this extraordinary Character and Commendation of him, that *never Man spake like him*: That they had never before heard any one deliver such wise and excellent Instructions, so rational and pure a Doctrine,

trine, and so apt to convince and affect the **SERM.**  
Mind, as this Person, whom they supposed **XI.**  
to be an Impostor, had just now delivered  
to them.

It is not my Intention to consider particularly what that Discourse of our Saviour was, which made so great an Impression on the Minds of these Officers; but what I propose, is to take occasion from hence to speak somewhat in general concerning the Excellency of that Doctrine which our Blessed Lord delivered to the World; to shew how truly it deserves the Approbation of Men, and upon what accounts it is to be preferred to the teaching of any, who appeared in the Character either of Philosophers, or Prophets, or Institutors of Religion before him. After which, I shall make some proper Reflections upon this Subject.

For evincing the great Goodness and incomparable Excellency of our Saviour's Doctrine, I shall first consider what the great Design proposed by it is, and whether this be not unexceptionably most worthy and good: And then shew that this most worthy and excellent Design has been prosecuted and urged by our Lord by Methods the most proper and effectual, and such as give his Institution a great advantage above the



SER M. Schemes and Institutions of Philosophers, and  
 XI. all the other Teachers and Instructors of  
 Mankind.

*First*, As for the Design of our Saviour's Doctrine, and the great Excellency of that; It will not be necessary to use many Words upon these Points. Whoever looks into the Gospel, will easily perceive that the great End proposed by the Author of it, is the Reformation of Men, and the improving them in all Virtue\*. Our Lord himself declares, that

Matth. ix. *he came to call Sinners to Repentance*, to correct every thing that is amiss in the Tempers and Manners of Men, and to engage them to an universal Purity both in Heart and Life.

Matth. v. *In another place, he says that he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them*; that he did not intend, in the Religion which he was about to institute, to dissolve any of the natural and moral Obligations which were laid upon Men before his Appearance; but that, on the contrary, he designed to confirm and reinforce these Obligations, to perfect the Design of the Law and

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\* If any would choose to represent the Salvation of Men as the End of the Christian Institution, rather than their Improvement in Virtue; There need be no Dispute about this. It is plain that our Saviour intended both, and that these Ends are most strictly and inseparably connected, or rather coincident; an entire Freedom from Vice, and the Possession of all virtuous Qualities, being the very State of Salvation, the highest Perfection of Human Nature, and the certain and immediate Source of its greatest Happiness.

*the Prophets, by inculcating the Doctrines of* **SERM.**  
*Piety and Virtue, and urging the Practice* **XI.**  
*of them in the most effectual manner upon*  
*Mankind. The Apostles have given us the*  
*same Notion of the Design of the Chri-*  
*stian Institution with that which was de-*  
*livered by our Saviour himself. Thus St. Paul*  
*informs us, that the Grace of God that bring-* Tit. iii.  
*geth Salvation, by which he means the salu-* 11, 12.  
*tary Doctrine of the Gospel, hath appeared*  
*unto all Men, teaching us, that denying Un-*  
*godliness and worldly Lusts, we should live*  
*soberly, righteously, and godly in this present*  
*World. St. John declares, that the Purpose* 1 Joh. iii.  
*of the Son of God's manifestation in the Flesh,* 8.  
*of his Doctrine and Life in this World, was*  
*that he might destroy the Works of the Devil,*  
*that he might remove from among Men*  
*all Idolatry, Corruption, and Vice, and that*  
*in the room thereof, he might plant all*  
*Virtue and Goodness among them. And the*  
*Apostle Peter tells us, that God having raised* Acts iii.  
*up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless us in turn-* 26.  
*ing away every one of us from our Iniquities.*  
 These are such clear and full Declarations, as  
 leave no room to doubt of the true Intention  
 of Christianity. Every one who impartially  
 considers them must be satisfied that our Sa-  
 viour designed, by means of his Religion, to  
 purify

SERMON. purify and reform our Nature, and to make

**XI.** Mankind most sincerely and universally holy and virtuous. And if it should be said that besides the Reformation of Men, there are some other things intended by the Christian Institution, such as the instructing us in certain Doctrines not discoverable by Reason, and the engaging us to an Observance of some peculiar Forms of external Religion; I answer, that whatever of this sort is intended by it, is always in subordination to the establishing the Practice of moral Virtue among Men, which is evidently the great and ultimate End of the Christian Dispensation, to which every other thing in it is made subservient; and therefore we find that both the Doctrines of the Gospel, and the positive Rites of it, have all a practical View and Tendency, and that unless the Belief of its Doctrines and the Use of its Rites be the means of influencing us to a pious and good Life, they cannot be of the least significancy.

Jam. ii. 16, 17. *Faith without Works is dead, says St. James, and profiteth not.* And from the express Declaration of our Saviour, we learn, that no Participation of the outward Institutions and Privileges of his Religion, will prevent our being rejected and condemned by him at last, if we

Luke xiii. 25, 26, 27. *have been the Workers of Iniquity.*

That



That the purifying of the human Nature, SERM.  
and the improving it in all virtuous Qua- XI.  
lities, is a most excellent and worthy Under-  
taking, must be evident to every one who re-  
flects upon it, with the least Attention. For  
besides that this discovers the most noble and  
generous Sense of moral Goodness, it at the  
same time confers the greatest Benefits upon  
Men; by dignifying and adorning their Na-  
ture, by exalting them to the truest Sublimity,  
and bringing them to the nearest Resem-  
blance which they can have to that glorious  
Being, whose Nature is the Original and  
Standard of all Excellency, and by laying the  
surest Foundation for their living happily in  
this World, and their arriving at a State of  
the greatest Perfection and Happiness in the  
World to come.

It must be owned indeed that this Design  
is not peculiar to the Doctrine of our Saviour:  
The promoting of moral Virtue is a thing  
so apparently good, the common Nature of  
Mankind inclines them all so much to ap-  
prove of it, that there has never been any In-  
stitution either of Philosophy or Religion, that  
had any tolerable share of Wisdom in it,  
which has not proposed this as its End. One  
of the ancient moral Writers tells us, that the  
great Purpose to which Philosophy was di-  
rected,

SERMON rected, was *the purifying and perfecting the*

**XI.** *Life of Man.* And the same thing was very evidently intended by that Scheme of Religion which was established by *Moses*, and which was more fully explained and opened up by the succeeding Prophets of the *Jews*, in whose Writings we every where find, that the matters upon which that Religion laid the greatest Stress, were an inward Purity and Integrity of Mind, and an outward good Conversation; without which the most punctual Observation of the Forms and Ceremonies that had been imposed upon the *Jews*, was not at all regarded. The superior Excellency, therefore, of our Saviour's Doctrine, above that of other Instructors of Mankind, is not to be brought merely from the End which it has in view, which is common to his with other Institutions: But that which gives his Institution vastly the preference to all others, is its prosecuting the excellent End proposed by it, by means much more effectual and more likely to bring it to pass, than any that those other Institutions have ever employed for accomplishing it. And this is the *second* point which I am to illustrate.

Though it is certain that the natural Powers of Men may enable them, antecedently to the Discoveries of Revelation, to form

such

such a comprehensive Scheme of Religion, as may be sufficient to direct and engage them to the practice of all Virtue; though several who have had no acquaintance with Revelation have actually formed such a Scheme, and have found the great Use of it both in the Government of their own Lives, and in enabling them to give Instructions to others for the good Conduct of theirs; yet, when we consider how few of those who had no other Light than that of Nature and Reason to direct them, did ever form any thing like a rational and just Scheme of Religion, in comparison of that great multitude, who, through a natural Inattention, an utter Neglect of Reasoning, and even an Abuse of their reasonable Powers, wandered perpetually in Ignorance and Error as to many points of great consequence, having but little more Sense of Religion and the Obligations of Virtue than the Observations which they must necessarily have made upon the Frame of the Universe, however slight these might have been, and the moral and social Nature which God had given them unavoidably forced upon them; and having even this corrupted and weakened by the vain and superstitious Notions which they entertained, and the debauched Practices in which they too freely indulged themselves:

When



SERM. When we consider farther how the wisest

**XI.** Men among the *Heathens*, those who are universally allowed to have made the greatest progress in true Philosophy, remained doubtful, after all their researches, of the truth of certain Principles which have always a great Influence upon the Practice of Virtue, and are absolutely necessary for its Support in many Cases; and were altogether unacquainted with some Motives to it, of great efficacy, which could be discovered to Men only by Revelation: And when we consider, lastly, how little opportunity the Philosophers had of propagating their Notions, and how little able they were to inculcate them with such Weight and Authority, as were necessary for bearing down the Prejudices, and calming the Passions of Men, for engaging their Attention and disposing them to receive the Truth in the Love of it, and to suffer it to produce its proper Effects upon them: When we consider, I say, all these things, which are very well known Facts, it must be evident that for bringing about any remarkably great and general Reformation among Men, and for raising them up to that Perfection in Virtue which their Nature and Circumstances in this World will very well admit of, some more powerful Assistancess were wanted than those

those which the Light of Reason and the several Powers of Nature, and the Institutions of Philosophy did afford. SERM. XI.

And though the *Jewish* Institution afforded some considerable Helps and Advantages for the practice of Virtue, more than the common Light of Nature and the Improvements of Philosophy had given, by delivering very clearly many of the most important Principles of Religion, and urging them by an Authority which was not to be disputed, and which could not but make a great Impression upon the Mind; yet it is plain enough that it did not give such great Assurances and Encouragements for this purpose, as a religious Institution might have given, nor did the *Jews*, for the most part, after all the Advantages which they had for leading holy and virtuous Lives, arrive at that height of Piety and Goodness, to which many, by the benefit of a better Institution, have since attained. This comparative Weakness of the *Jewish* Religion for making Men holy and good, is frequently taken notice of in the Writings of St. *Paul*, and will be evident to any one who only considers, among other things, that this Religion had originally no other Sanctions than temporal Promises and Threatnings, that it contained no express Declara-

tions

SERMONS about a future State, and gave at best

**XI.** but some obscure Hopes of spiritual and eternal Blessings; and that besides this inward Defect, the external Pomp of it, however necessary it might have been in the Circumstances of the *Jews*, could not but have an unhappy Effect on many of them, by drawing off their Attention from the things which were intrinsically worthy and good, and making them spend their Time and Care in an observance of some indifferent Ceremonies; so that while they were very much amused and dazzled with the outward Solemnity and Splendour of their Worship, their Hearts were left uncultivated, and but little of the true Fruits of Piety and Virtue were to be found in their Conversations.

But now the Institution of our Saviour has done a great deal more for the Reformation of Mankind, and their Advancement in Virtue, than any Systems of Philosophy, and than any other Institution of Religion could ever do. It has prosecuted this noble End by the wisest and best Means that have been ever proposed for effecting it, and such as, if well improved, will most certainly and easily bring it to pass. For making this appear, let us consider,



1. That the fundamental Principles of Piety and Goodness, which the Light of Nature most clearly taught, which the Philosophers inculcated, and which *Moses* and the Prophets delivered in their Writings, concerning the difference between Moral Good and Evil, the Nature of Virtue and Vice and their respective Tendencies, the Being and Attributes of God, his Providence, and Government of Mankind; that all these are repeated and published again in the Revelation of the Gospel, free from every Mixture of Error and Superstition, and put in such a light as will be most apt to give them their full Force and Influence upon the Mind. And this is certainly a Circumstance of considerable moment: For however the Evidence of these great Articles is so very strong and obvious, that not only Men of Reflection among the *Heathens*, but the greatest part of them have always had some Belief and Sense of them, yet it is certain that they were held by the generality of them, not in their genuine Simplicity, but obscured and depraved by many Errors and Follies, which were more especially blended with their Notions and Reasonings about the Divine Nature and Perfections, concerning which they became *vain in their Imaginations*, and took up such monstrous Opinions<sup>21.</sup>

SERM. XI.

SERM. as were the Foundation of the grossest Idolatry, Superstition, and Immorality. And with regard even to the *Jews*, I think, it may be affirmed, that whatever improved Notions, beyond what commonly prevailed among the *Heathens*, were delivered to them concerning the Supreme Being, they were not yet so clear and full as to hinder their running very easily into narrow and partial Conceptions of him, as if his Goodness was confined to their Nation, and they were the only People in the World that he had any Concern for; and as if his Presence was limited to their Temple, and no Services would please him which were not performed there; in consequence of which, they became vain, and proud, and insolent Despisers of the rest of Mankind, and most groundlessly presumed on the Favour of God, even while they were committing the greatest Impieties. But now the Doctrine of Christianity upon these first and most necessary Points, is throughout rational and pure, being the sum of all the wisest Apprehensions which Mankind have ever had concerning them, separated from all their Mistakes, and delivered with so much Clearness and Simplicity, that it must easily approve itself to the Mind, and if digested with any care, may be the sure Foundation  
of

of a worthy and good Conduct; particularly, the Representation which it gives us of the Attributes and Perfections of God, his Unity and spiritual Nature, his almighty Power, his infinite Wisdom and supreme and universal Dominion, his unlimited Goodness and impartial Justice, his perfect Purity and inflexible Regard to Virtue; the Representation, I say, which the Gospel gives us of these Divine Attributes, is such as Reason must immediately approve, and allow to be every way worthy of the supreme Mind, and cannot fail to raise in all who seriously attend to it, the highest Veneration, Gratitude, and Love towards this most adorable and excellent Being, and effectually restrain them both from Idolatry and Superstition, keeping them steadfast in the Worship of the one true God, and making them to seek his Favour, only by proper and worthy Methods, by Innocence and an universal Integrity of Heart and Life, which are the great Qualifications that he has a respect to, and which alone can find acceptance with him.

2. There are other Principles, of vast consequence, for supporting the Practice of Virtue, which appeared somewhat doubtful to the most considerate Persons among the *Heathens*, and some of them even to the *Jews*, which are fully ascertained and put beyond



SERM. all doubt by the Revelation of Christia-  
 XI. nity. Such, for instance, are the great Doc-  
 trines concerning *the Immortality of the Soul,*  
*and a future State of Rewards and Punish-*  
*ments*; which, whatever solid Foundation they  
 may have in Nature and Reason, were never  
 so clear and manifest even to the Philosophers  
 of the greatest Name, but that they frequent-  
 ly discovered an uneasiness about the truth of  
 them, and that they wanted some stronger  
 Evidence for establishing their Minds in the  
 firm Persuasion and Belief of them; and which  
 were so sparingly delivered in the sacred Books  
 of the *Law*, that the Reception which these  
 Doctrines met with, which was indeed pretty  
 general among the *Jews*, especially towards the  
 Conclusion of their State, (tho' there was one  
 numerous Sect of them, which always disbelie-  
 ved them,) whencesoever it was derived, could  
 hardly have proceeded from any Notices of  
 them that were originally contained in their  
 Religion. But now the Revelation of the *Gospel*  
 hath brought *Life and Immortality to light*: The  
 Doctrine of our Saviour hath extricated Man-  
 kind from all the Darkness and Perplexity which  
 they were formerly in, with regard to a future  
 Life, hath opened and enlarged their Prospects  
 beyond the Grave, and given such an affu-  
 rance of another World, in which Mankind  
 are to be inconceivably happy or miserable,  
 according

2 Tim. i.  
10.

according to their good or bad Conduct here, SERM.  
as may make all who attend to it acquiesce in XI.  
a full Expectation of this other World, and  
remove from their Minds every suspicion of  
its Reality. Such likewise is the Doctrine  
concerning *the Efficacy of Repentance*, which,  
however credible it may be upon Principles  
of Reason, and whatever strong Hope or Per-  
suasion several of the *Heathens* had of the  
Truth of it, seems to have been uncertain in  
the Judgment even of some thinking Men  
in the *Pagan* World, and much more in the  
Opinion of the Vulgar, if we may judge of  
their Notions from their Practice of endeavour-  
ing to appease the Wrath of God, and to pro-  
cure his Favour, not by the Exercise of a true  
Repentance, but by offering one sort of sacri-  
fice after another to him, and by many super-  
stitious ridiculous Rites which were altoge-  
ther impertinent and ineffectual for the pur-  
pose. But now the Efficacy of Repentance is  
one of the clearest Principles in the Christian  
Institution; the Declarations of our Lord and  
his Apostles are so express and full upon this  
head, that every one who believes them and  
knows himself to be a true Penitent, must  
banish away all Doubts and Fears about his  
being in a state of Acceptance with God, and  
rejoice in the sure Hope of the Divine For-

SERM. giveness and Favour. After these, I may in-

XI. stance in another important Principle of Religion, which has received a great Confirmation in the Institution of our Saviour, which is the Doctrine of a *Divine Assistance, accompanying the Endeavours of Men in Virtue*: Of this Assistance, it is certain that not only the *Jews* but the *Heathens* had some Notion and Expectation; for we find the Philosophers frequently hinting at it, and proposing it as a Motive and Encouragement to Virtue; but it can hardly be supposed that any of the *Heathens* ever looked upon it as a thing more than probable, or which the Goodness of the Deity and his Love of Virtue might incline him to grant to Men; Whereas the Doctrine of our Saviour has made such a plain Offer, and given such a positive Promise of it, that all who seriously apply themselves to the Practice of Virtue, may depend that they will be supported in it; that God will go along with them in all their Attempts to reform themselves, and make their Endeavours successful. Now whoever considers how absolutely necessary the Belief of at least some of these Principles is for promoting Virtue among Men, and the great influence which the Belief of all of them must have upon the practice of it, that a full and steady Persuasion of the

the



the Truth of them is enough to fortify a Man SERM.  
 against all possible Temptations to desert his XI.  
 Duty, and to make him adhere to it in the  
 most difficult Circumstances; whoever, I say,  
 considers this, must see that the Institution of  
 our Saviour, by bringing these Principles out  
 of the Uncertainty in which they formerly  
 lay, and settling them upon a sure Foundati-  
 on, has done a most important service to the  
 Cause of Virtue, has provided much more  
 effectually for its prevailing, and given it a  
 vastly stronger Support and Establishment  
 than any Institution ever did before.

3. The Religion of our Saviour has sug-  
 gested some most noble and powerful Mo-  
 tives for engaging Men to Virtue, which are  
 peculiar to itself, and which the World were  
 never acquainted with before: I mean those  
 which arise from the infinite Love of God,  
 in sending *his only-begotten Son* into the World,  
 to make a Revelation of his Will to Mankind,  
 to propose and declare the Terms of Accep-  
 tance with him, and to give us all necessary  
 Help and Encouragement for coming up to  
 these Terms; and from the infinite Conde-  
 scension and Love of our Blessed Saviour in  
 taking our Nature upon him, and all that he  
 acted, taught, and suffered, for recovering  
 us more effectually from our sinful and mise-

SERMON. rable Condition, and bringing us to a State of

XI. everlasting Perfection and Happiness; and  
 from the great Goodness of appointing the  
 holy Spirit of God to be the Sanctifier and  
 Guide of good Men, who is to reside continually with us, to be the Principle of spiritual Life and Joy in our Hearts, to support and comfort us in the performance of our Duty: Whoever attends to this new and wonderful Scene of Divine Love and Goodness towards Mankind, which the Gospel has exhibited to our View, may certainly find force enough in it for filling him with all the Sentiments of the strongest Gratitude and Love towards almighty God, and our blessed Saviour, for producing in him the most chearful and universal Obedience to their Will, for making him to abound in all the most noble Acts of Piety, and in all the Instances of the most generous and sublime Virtue.

4. The positive Institutions and external Rites of Christianity contribute much better to the Advancement of Piety and Virtue, than those of any other Religion have ever done. Something of this sort seems to be necessary in every Religion, both for continuing and propagating the Profession of it, and conveying the Doctrines and Principles of it with a stronger and more lively Impression into the Minds of Men.

But

But the Rites and Forms of most of the Re-  
ligions which have been ever known in the  
World, instead of serving the Interest of true  
Religion, and promoting what must be the  
End of that, have either had no rela-  
tion to this purpose, or been unhappily the  
means of prejudicing and defeating it: This  
is notoriously true of a great part, at least,  
of the religious Rites and Customs of the  
*Heathens*, many of which were altogether  
foolish and ridiculous, and several of them  
flagrantly impious and immoral. Nor can  
it be denied, that the Ceremonies and Forms  
of the *Jews*, though originally very well in-  
tended, did always, by the Multiplicity and  
great Variety of them, too much ingross the  
Minds, and engage the Attention of that Peo-  
ple, and came at last to shut out almost all  
solid Piety and Goodness from among them.  
But now the positive and ritual Precepts of  
Christianity are but few, and require nothing  
but what is very simple and easy, and are all  
wisely framed for securing the main End of  
the Gospel, and have the most direct and  
plain Tendency to promote it: For what can  
be more proper to keep up in our Minds a  
lively Sense of Virtue, and to confirm and set  
us forward in the Practice of it, than to  
enter ourselves into the Society of Christians,  
and

SERM.  
XI.  
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SERMON. and take upon us the Profession of the Go-

XI. spel in an open and solemn Manner ; to meet together at stated times in religious Assemblies, for worshipping God by Prayer and Thanksgiving ; for receiving Instructions in the great Duties of our Religion, and having the Principles and Motives of it strongly and affectionately inculcated upon us ; and for commemorating the Death of the great Founder of the Gospel, and the Benefits which we obtain by his Appearance in the World. These Institutions are manifestly calculated for raising pious and good Dispositions in the Hearts of Men, and we will not attend to them with Judgment and true Devotion, without perceiving the great Benefit and Use of them, in subduing our irregular Desires and Inclinations, in preserving us in a Divine Temper, and making us more expert and active in every part of our Duty.

5. Lastly, the Institution of the Gospel is compleated, and perfectly fitted for the Purpose of reforming Mankind by its divine Sanction, or the Confirmation which it receives from the Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles. The Religion of our Saviour in this respect, stands at least upon a level with the Institution of *Moses*, and the Doctrines of all the most famous Prophets of the
Old

Old Testament, and has a mighty advantage above the Institutions of the ancient *Heathen* Legislators and Philosophers, whose Doctrines and Precepts did indeed by their own Light and Evidence insinuate themselves into several inquisitive and free Minds, but for want of proper Methods to propagate them, and a proper Authority to enforce them, could never make any progress among the main Body of Men. Indeed the Generality of the World have naturally so much Levity and Inconstancy of Mind, and for the most part labour under so much Prejudice and Corruption, that it is very difficult to fix their Attention even on the most noble and important Objects, and to bring them so far as to hearken to a Doctrine which is perfectly pure and holy, and much more to make them heartily consent to it and live under its Power and Influence; so that whoever attempts to instruct and reform them, and would expect any great Success from his Endeavours, must find, if he can, some more powerful Means of engaging their Attention, and influencing their Minds, than the wisest and justest Reasoning which he can use with them, will be. Upon this account it was that the Lawgivers among the *Heathens* endeavoured to found their Institutions upon
the

SER M. the Authority of a Divine Commission, which

XI. they knew was a thing that would naturally strike the Minds of Men, and procure the greatest and most universal Reverence to their Instructions and Orders. Now what they falsely pretended to be, and for the most part so weakly, that none of any tolerable Reflection was ignorant of the Deceit, our Saviour proved that he really was: He shewed himself to be a Divine Teacher and Lawgiver, by performing, and enabling his Apostles likewise to perform, such mighty Works in confirmation of his Doctrine and Precepts, as carried the plainest Marks of the Interposition of Heaven, and which no Man could be

Joh. iii. 2 supposed to do, *except God was with him; which Circumstance must make a great Impression on the Minds of all Men, and give a full Conviction, if any thing at all will, even to the most Prejudiced and Inconsiderate, of the Truth of his Religion, and the Obligation of his Law, and of the great Danger of rejecting and disobeying them; according to that natural and obvious Reflection or the Apostle, How shall we escape if we neglect that great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, with Signs and Wonders,*

Heb. ii.
3, 4.

Wonders, and with diverse Miracles and Gifts SERM.
of the Holy Ghost. XI.

In this manner has our Saviour carried on and perfected the great Design of his Religion: Thus has he laid a sure Foundation for our practising all Virtue, and afforded us incomparably the greatest Advantages for this Purpose, that were ever granted to Mankind; and if his Institution is not effectual to engage us to Righteousness, it is hardly to be expected that any thing will be sufficient to do it. The Gospel has done every thing that is requisite in a rational and moral way, for operating upon the Minds of Men, and determining them to Virtue; and if after all they will, through a perverse and vicious Disposition of Heart, resist the Force of its Principles and Motives, the same will very probably make them resist all other means that can be used for their Reformation and Amendment. Our Saviour indeed offers no Violence to the Frame of human Nature; he does not by mere Force compel those to live well, who are obstinately resolved upon the contrary; but he has omitted nothing, that was proper to be proposed in a wise Institution, for recovering Men from their Sins, and exciting them to all Piety and Holiness: He has laid down such excellent Principles, he has inculcated such strong

SERM. Strong Arguments, he has offered us such
XI. great Assistances for engaging us to our Duty, and he has confirmed all with so high an Authority, that if we heartily believe his Religion, and live under its Influence, it will undoubtedly be the means of raising us up to the highest Degrees of Goodness that in this World we can attain to. The Christian Religion has heretofore been very remarkable for producing all manner of Virtue in those who sincerely embraced it; and more especially upon its first Appearance, when it was better understood, and more firmly believed than it usually is at present, it was famous for the Success which it had in raising up vast numbers from the lowest and most degenerate State, to be eminent Examples of all good Dispositions and Actions. And there is certainly the same Efficacy in our Religion that ever there was for reforming the Hearts and Manners of Men, if they be but careful to improve it, and willing to be governed by it. And if we are not reformed by it, the Fault is not to be charged upon the Gospel, which is an Institution every way fitted for obliging Men to Holiness and improving them in it, but upon ourselves, who do not comply with the Design of this excellent Institution, nor suffer it to have its proper Influence

fluence upon our Minds and our Conver-
sations. SERM.
XI.

I shall now conclude with two or three Reflections upon what has been discoursed.

1. The Consideration of the excellent Design of Christianity, and its great Use and Efficacy for supporting the Practice of all Virtue, may most justly recommend it to the Esteem and Affection of Mankind. There is certainly no Man who has any nobleness and generosity of Mind, and any regard to the Interest of Mankind, and who knows how much their Happiness depends upon the Purity of their Hearts and the Integrity and Goodness of their Conduct, but must heartily approve and value an Institution which contributes most effectually to the Reformation of the human Nature, and the adorning Men with all excellent and worthy Qualities. The Praises which have been bestowed upon the wise Institutions of the ancient Legislators, and the Schemes of the Philosophers for restraining the evil Passions of Mankind, and engaging them to the Love and Practice of Virtue, are much more evidently due to the Instruction of the Gospel, which greatly surpasses every other Institution that has been known in the Plainness
and

SERM. and Simplicity of its Doctrines, the Certainty

XI. and Efficacy of its Principles, the Excellency of

its Motives, and in every Circumstance that has any Influence upon the moral Conduct of Men.

I do not say, that the excellent Design and Tendency of the Gospel is sufficient to prove it to be strictly a Divine Institution ; for to the making out this Point, we must likewise bring in the Consideration of the Miracles that were wrought for the Confirmation of our Religion, which are a direct and solemn Attestation of its Divinity : But surely no one who is really a Friend to the Cause of Virtue and the Interest of Mankind, can ever be an Enemy to Christianity, if he truly understands it, and reflects upon its most wise and useful Tendency. The intrinsic Goodness of the Gospel, if it had nothing else to recommend it, is a just Foundation for our entertaining a favourable Opinion of it, and wishing all Success to it in the World, that it may become the Object of every Man's Attention, and the Rule by which he directed his Behaviour. And if this once becomes the Temper of any one with regard to the Christian Institution, we need hardly doubt but that a serious Inquiry into the Credibility of those extraordinary Facts, which support and confirm it, will make him fully acquiesce in the

the Belief of its Truth and Divine Authority. SERM.
XI.

2. We should be very thankful to God for the Christian Religion, and the great Advantages which it gives us for leading holy and virtuous Lives. It is a distinguishing Instance of the Divine Mercy towards us, that we live under this last and most gracious Dispensation of God to Mankind, which has afforded them such vastly better Helps for forsaking their Sins and performing their Duty, than were ever given to the World before; by means of which we can attain to Virtue, and the Rewards of it, at a much easier rate than good Men who lived under either the Law of Nature alone, or any former Dispensation of revealed Religion could have done. Our Saviour told his Disciples, that the ancient Patriarchs, and the Prophets and other holy Men under the *Jewish* Dispensation, earnestly desired and would have greatly rejoiced in those clear Discoveries and Revelations of the Counsels and Will of God, and the great Doctrines of Religion which he made to the World; but it pleased God to reserve them for the peculiar Blessings of those who have lived since the coming of his Son, and the promulgation of the Gospel; which was designed to supply the Defects of all former Revelations and Institutions,

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SERM. tions, and to give Men the utmost Advan-

XI. tages that they will ever attain to in this

World, for becoming holy and happy. When therefore we are Partakers of these great Benefits, we must be extremely stupid and insensible, if a grateful Impression of them does not always remain upon our Hearts. How should we rejoice in the Light which shines among us ! And how should our Souls magnify the Lord, the God of our Salvation, who hath visited and redeemed us, and hath raised up for us a mighty Salvation,, that we may escape from all the Snares and Temptations of our spiritual Enemies, and serve him without Fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before him all the Days of our Life.

Luke i.
68,69,74,
75.

3. Let us be careful to depart from Iniquity, and to abound in all Virtue and Holiness. If this is ever to be expected from any Men, it is certainly to be expected from the Professors of Christianity, who cannot indulge themselves in the least degree or instance of Wickedness, without going contrary to the whole Design and Aim of their Religion, and breaking through all the Ties which can have any force upon reasonable Creatures, and moral Agents. Those who are in the most unhappy Situation for doing their Duty, who have their Lot in the darkest and

most

most corrupted Parts of the World, have still SERM.
so much Power, and so many Advantages XI.
from Nature and the common Dispensations
of Providence for performing it, that they
may be justly said to be *without Excuse*,
whenever they neglect it: But what then
must be the Case of those Christians, who,
by being instructed in the Doctrines and
Principles of the Gospel, have had all the
Opportunities and Advantages as well as Ob-
ligations that any Men can have, for be-
coming good and virtuous, and notwith-
standing continue impenitent and wicked?
They are plainly the most guilty and in-
excusable of all Men, and discover such a
strong bent to Vice, a Heart so thoroughly
possessed with the Love of it, and so entire-
ly under its Dominion, as must render them
most hateful in the sight both of God and
Man. If we would in any sort answer the
Obligations which Christianity hath laid upon
us, and make a proper Improvement of the
Helps which it affords us for the Practice
of Virtue, we shall not only keep ourselves
innocent and free from every prevailing Sin,
but endeavour to become remarkable for all
good Qualities; we shall not content our-
selves with any small Attainments in Virtue,
but be always forming ourselves upon the
Y 2 Example

SERM. Example of Almighty God, and be in a

XI. continual Progress towards the Perfection
 of Goodness: We shall consider ourselves

as designed, according to our Saviour's Si-

Matth. v. 14. militude, to be the *Light of the World*; as
 Persons who are to diffuse an enlivening and

salutary Influence, and set a bright Pattern

to all around us; who are to adorn Religion,

and recommend it by our Conduct to the

Approbation and Love of Mankind. This

Eph. iv. 1. will be *to walk worthy of the Vocation where-*

with we are called, and to have our Conver-

Phil. i. 27 *sation such as becometh the Gospel of Christ*;

to make our Practice bear a Conformity to

our Notions, and the Principles by which

we profess to be governed. And this is the

only way in which we can make our Pro-

fession of Christianity turn to any valuable

account to us. When our Character of

Christians is no more than a Name, it may

indeed serve for a Mark of Distinction, and

furnish us with matter of Talk and Dispu-

tation, and perhaps sometimes be useful in

promoting some low worldly Designs; but

except it be accompanied with a proportion-

able Behaviour, it will be so far from advan-

cing our spiritual Interest, and increasing our

future Happiness, that with regard to these

we must suffer very greatly upon the ac-

count

count of it, according to that most equi-
table and impartial Rule of Divine Judg-
ment, *To whomsoever much is given, of him*
much will be required; in consequence of

SERM.
XI.

Luke xii.

47, 48.

which we are told, that *the Servant who*
knows the Will of his Lord, and prepareth
not himself, neither doth according to his Will,
shall be beaten with many Stripes.

Disposition, and the Right Duty
and Advantages of inquiring into
Matters of Religion.

Practical upon Occasion of receiving
Fidelity from Popery.

Acts XVII. 11, 12.
These were more noble than those in Thessal-
onica, in that they received the Word with
all readiness of mind, and searched the
Scriptures daily, whether those things were
so, or no: many of them believed.

Y 3 SERMON

This Person of whom the sacred
Historian gives this excellent Cha-
racter, were certain Jews, Inha-
bitants of Beroea, a Town of Macedonia, to
which the Apostle Paul and his Fellow-La-
borers came.

SERMON XII.

The Excellency of an inquisitive
Disposition, and the Right, Duty,
and Advantages of inquiring into
Matters of Religion.

Preached upon Occasion of receiving a
Profelyte from Popery.

ACTS XVII. 11, 12.

*These were more noble than those in Thessa-
lonica, in that they received the Word with
all readiness of Mind, and searched the
Scriptures daily, whether those things were
so. Therefore many of them believed.*

THE Persons of whom the sacred
Historian gives this excellent Cha-
racter, were certain *Jews*, Inha-
bitants of *Berea*, a Town of *Macedonia*, to
which the Apostle *Paul* and his Fellow-La-
bourer

bourer *Silas* came, in one of their Progresses for propagating the Knowledge of Christianity. The Treatment which the Apostle received from his Countrymen here, was very different from that which he had received from them in most other Places, and particularly in *Thessalonica*, from whence he was just arrived; where some of the unbelieving *Jews*, being full of that bitter and persecuting Zeal which so generally possessed them against the Christian Religion, had raised a Tumult or Insurrection, in which they would have destroyed *St. Paul* and his Companion *Silas*, unless they had with great privacy and expedition made their escape to the neighbouring Town of *Berea*.

The *Jews* of *Berea*, to their everlasting honour, discovered a more generous and manly Disposition. They would not condemn *St. Paul* upon mere Prejudice, but resolved to hear him fairly and patiently, to know what his Doctrine was, and what he could offer for the Support of it; and particularly to compare it with those Scriptures, to which he appealed for the Truth of it, and to see whether it was agreeable to them, or no; and according as they found it well or ill supported, either to receive or reject it. This they did; and in consequence of it,

Y 4 many

SERM. many of them became sincere Profelytes and

XII. Converts to Christianity.

What I propose to do, in discoursing upon this Passage, is to raise some useful Observations from it, and to illustrate and improve them in the Order in which they arise.

I. And the first Observation which I shall make is this; *that a Disposition to search for the Truth in Matters of Religion, and to receive it without Prejudice, wherever it appears, is an Argument of a generous and liberal Mind.* This is the very thing, for which the *Berean Jews* are here commended as Persons of more generous Principles and a more noble Spirit than those of *Thessalonica*, who blindly rejected and opposed the Truth without Examination. And certainly the Praise which is given them on this account, is very just and well founded. A sincere disinterested Love of Truth, which makes a Man diligent as well as impartial in his Inquiries after it, is one of the most worthy Qualities which can be in the Mind, is a sure Foundation of valuable Improvements, and will always raise the Persons in whom it prevails, above the common level, and set them in an higher Order and Class of Mankind. It is the misfortune not only of those, who have but very little time to spare from the necessary and daily Occu-

pations

pations of a low Life, but of many others who may be supposed to have both Capacity and Leisure, if they would but improve them, for thinking and reasoning, to neglect in a great measure all rational Inquiries, and to be governed almost entirely by Prejudices even in matters of the greatest moment; to be carried away with an enthusiastick Zeal, which will bear no contradiction, for Opinions and Tenets in Religion, which, for any thing they know, may have no Foundation either in Reason or Revelation, but which have been only inculcated on them in the course of their Education, or which have been recommended to them by Authority, by the Tradition of their Party, or the Vogue and Fashion of their Country. This Submissiveness of Understanding, this implicit Belief of whatever is obtruded with an appearance of great Authority and Solemnity in Religion, is one of those Weaknesses which are most incident to Mankind; it is a thing which they are easily brought to, and for which it is difficult to find a Remedy. When therefore we see any Person keeping clear of this Intanglement, and nobly asserting and using his Right of judging for himself in all matters of Religion and Morality, admitting no Principle, how sacred and venerable soever it may be accounted,

SERM. counted, till he is first satisfied of the Truth

XII. of it, and receiving every one that he sees is well supported, however unpopular and unfashionable; we may very well conclude that he is possessed of a greater Strength of Mind, and a more generous Freedom and Inlargement of Heart, than is to be found in the greatest part of Men. Such an one has a just Sense of the Dignity of the rational Nature, and displays it to great advantage in his own Conduct, and will certainly obtain a high Degree of Respect and Honour from all the wiser and better sort of Mankind. Not only the sacred Writers have approved and applauded this inquisitive unprejudiced Temper, this hearty and honest Disposition to search out and embrace the Truth, but the Philosophers likewise had a high Sense of its Excellency, some of * whom have spoken of the *free Exercise of Reason*, and the polishing and improving of it, as one of the *noblest Employments*, and most *worthy of the Care of a wise Man*; and have, on the contrary, represented the *Neglect of Reason*, and the embracing and holding Opinions which have not been carefully examined, and which have no sufficient Evidence to support them, as a *Rashness unworthy of the Wisdom and Gravity of the Human Nature*.

Marc.
Anton.
Cicero.

Before

Before I proceed to another Observation, I SERM.
shall make a short Inference or two from XII.
what has been said on this.

And the first is, that the Objections which have been raised against an inquisitive free Spirit, as tending to Scepticism and Infidelity, to the Subversion of all Order and Polity, and the introducing universal Confusion both into Religious and Civil Societies, must be altogether vain and groundless. For certainly this Spirit which is so worthy and honourable in itself, and which has been so much commended by the sacred Writers, can never be productive of such pernicious and fatal Effects; It may very well be presumed, on the contrary, that a Disposition, which is so great an Ornament, must likewise be of great Use and Benefit in human Life; and that instead of perplexing and confounding Men, and disturbing their Affairs, it must tend to the Satisfaction and Settlement of their Minds, and the Establishment of their Happiness: And this is certainly the Truth of the matter. Indeed they must be either very weak and inconsiderate Men, who have their Minds blinded with Bigotry and false Zeal; or crafty designing Men, who have some private Interests to serve by the Support of Opinions, which they know will not bear an Examination, who can
ever

SERM. ever be alarmed at the Freedom of Inquiry,
 XII. and raise the Outcry of Scepticism and Con-
 fusion when it takes place. All Persons who
 have a true Judgment, and an upright Inten-
 tion, will be exceedingly pleased when they
 find an inquisitive Genius prevailing, know-
 ing very well that this must always issue in
 a surer and more universal Discovery of Truth,
 and consequently in the greater Happiness of
 Mankind; that all Opinions, Constitutions,
 and Establishments, whether religious or po-
 litical, which are founded in Reason, and are
 intended for the benefit of human Society,
 have nothing to fear from the strictest Inqui-
 ries which can be made into them; but that
 the more they are searched into, and the bet-
 ter they are known, the more heartily will they
 be approved and valued; that the only things
 which will suffer by being brought to a tryal,
 are Falshood and Imposture, and that it is al-
 ways the Interest of Mankind to have these
 detected and exposed.

Secondly, We may here farther infer, that
 the Use of Force for propagating religious
 Doctrines and Articles of Faith is unjustifiable.
 Were there no other Considerations to prove
 this point, this one would be sufficient, that
 Force tends directly to discourage and suppress
 this generous Spirit of Examination and ra-

tional

tional Inquiry, which it is both the Glory SERM.
and Happiness of Mankind to cultivate and XII.

exert : In vain shall we expect the Prevalency
of an inquisitive Disposition, while great Hazards and Inconveniencies are the known and unavoidable Consequences of it ; while a certain Set of Doctrines and Opinions are authoritatively prescribed to the Understandings and Faith of Men, to which all must assent, from which at least none must presume to differ, as they would not forfeit the Privileges which belong to them as Members of Society, and suffer in their Liberties, Fortunes, and Lives. It must be a much stronger Resolution, and a more heroick Degree of Virtue, than is ever to be expected in the generality of the World, that can prompt a Man to examine into the Grounds of the Opinions which he embraces and professes, and to search impartially for the Truth, under such Discouragements : These Difficulties will effectually turn the far greater part of Mankind out of the way of all Inquiry, and bring them into the most ignominious State of blind Submission to their spiritual Dictators, and into all the Ignorance, Corruption, and Misery, which naturally arise out of that Condition.

Whoever therefore has any just Concern, either for the Dignity or the Happiness of the human

SERM. human Nature, will certainly be an Enemy

XII. to Persecution, or to all the compulsive
 Methods of propagating Religion; and be for
 securing to Mankind an unmolested Liberty
 of examining impartially, and speaking freely
 in all Points, which do not affect the Safety of
 civil Government and Society: And that this
 Liberty may be the more firmly established,
 and no Pretence or Handle afforded to any,
 who may envy it, to take it away, it con-
 cerns all who pretend to be possessed of the
 Spirit of it, to act with great Prudence and
 Caution; to make it appear that it is not
 Pride, or Vanity, or any other evil Passion,
 which makes them differ from what is com-
 monly received, and call Opinions into ques-
 tion which have great Names and Authorities
 to support them, but a sincere Desire of ob-
 taining a rational Conviction of the Principles
 of Religion; to consider every Point for
 which the Publick has a Reverence, not in
 the way of Banter and Cavilling, of petulant
 and abusive Railery; but in the Spirit of E-
 quity and Candour, with Humility, Meek-
 ness, and Modesty, and a Disposition to fall
 in with the prevailing Belief and Opinion, if
 upon Examination, they shall be found true.
 This discreet Use of Liberty is the best Method
 of recommending it, and making the Princi-

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ples

ples of it to take root and spread; as it will make the World most sensible of the Excellency and Advantages of it, without giving occasion to complain of any Evils or Inconveniencies attending it. SERM.
XII.

2. I come now to another Observation, that naturally arises from the Text; which is, that *the Apostles and first Teachers of Christianity were far from claiming an implicit Submission to their Doctrines, or expecting that Men should embrace them any farther than they perceived them upon Tryal and Inquiry to be true.* This was very remarkable in the Conduct of our Blessed Saviour himself, who, though a Teacher the most infallible, and of the greatest Authority of any that ever appeared in the World, yet never required the *Jews* to believe him upon his bare affirmation, but constantly appealed to the Writings of their own Prophets, and the Miracles which he wrought before their eyes, as affording undeniable Proofs of his Divine Commission, and laid the whole Weight of their Condemnation for rejecting him, upon those Prejudices and evil Dispositions, which hindered their discerning, or acknowledging what was so very clear and evident. When the Apostles succeeded him in the Design of propagating Christianity, they observed the same Method :

SERM. Method : They did not think it sufficient to

XII tell the World, that they were full of the Divine Spirit, and under a supernatural Impulse, and that therefore whatever they delivered, was to be received and believed without Examination; on the contrary, they desired nothing more than that all Men would try the Truth and Justice of their Pretensions fully and impartially, and regard them no otherwise than as they found them to be supported by the Truth and Consistency of the Doctrine which they preached, by the Authority of a former Revelation, and by certain extraordinary Facts which were unexceptionable and incontestable: And when they found any disposed to make this Tryal honestly and fairly, they highly approved them for it; several Instances of which, besides the one mentioned in the Text, occur in the History of the New Testament. Nor was it only while they were making Profelytes, that they allowed and encouraged a Liberty of Examination, which even those who are avowed Enemies to it upon other Occasions, are forced to do; but after they had brought over great Numbers of Men to the Profession of their Religion, they never pretended to a *Dominion over the Faith* of their Converts, but freely disclaimed it, and

2 Cor. i.
24.

per-

permitted them always to use their own Judgment, and to follow that, even in Points wherein it differed from theirs. They told them that Deceivers and Impostors had arisen, and that therefore they should *try the Spirits*, ^{1 John iv. 1.} or the various Pretences which Men might make to Inspiration and Miracles; that they should *prove all Things*, in order to their *holding fast what* appeared to be good; and that they should study the Grounds and Principles of their Religion, that they might be able *from their own Reasoning*, and not by alledging the Authority of any Persons, to *support and defend it*. ^{1 Theff. v. 21.} Thus humble and modest were the first Teachers and Propagators of the Christian Religion, in claiming no Power over the Understanding and Reason of Mankind, in treating Men always with that Decency and Respect which are due to their intelligent Nature, by allowing them to judge freely of their Doctrine, and to be fully convinced of the Truth of it, before they desired them to receive and profess it. ^{1 Pet. iii. 15.} This, it must be owned, was a fair and generous Conduct, and argued both the honest Intention of the first Preachers of the Gospel, and the Truth and Goodness of the Gospel itself, which could prevail and triumph by the pure Evidence of Reason and Miracles that accom-

SERM. panied it, without the Assistance of Authority and Force, and any of those Arts of Fraud and Cunning, which must be always used for propagating and supporting an Imposture.

I shall conclude this Point with one very obvious Reflection, upon the great Difference between the Method of propagating Religion, which was observed by the first Teachers and Ministers of Christianity, and that which has been adopted by many of their Successors. Our Lord himself and his Apostles, as we have already seen, endeavoured to make Disciples only by the means of Instruction and Persuasion, by laying before Men a rational Scheme of Religion, and confirming and supporting it by proper Evidences: they never made use of their own Infallibility, as a Pretence for bearing down the Reason of Mankind, and preventing an Examination of their Doctrines; they were far from expecting any thing like an implicit or enthusiastic Belief in their Followers; but if Men became Christians at all, they would have them to become such, upon Inquiry and Conviction. But this Method has been laid aside by Persons, who, though they have made the greatest Noise, about being the Vicegerents of our Saviour, and Successors of the Apostles, have not had the least Regard to their

their Conduct and Example; who have set up a Claim to Infallibility, and an unerring Judgment in all Points of Faith, and in consequence of this, have assumed a Power of dictating to Christians, and binding their own Decisions upon them, by all the Penalties which can be inflicted in this World, and by all the Terrors of eternal Damnation in the next; who have prohibited and discouraged all Inquiries, and represented the least Doubt about their Right to determine in Controversies of Religion as a very heinous and capital Crime; and who have magnified a Resignation of the Understanding and an implicit Subjection of Mind, as most worthy Qualifications and necessary Duties in all Christians. This is the Method in which many pretended Successors of the Apostles have chosen to propagate and defend the Faith. How intolerably presumptuous and arrogant such a Conduct is, how irreconcilable to the Humility, Meekness, and Gentleness of Christ and his immediate Followers, is a thing too evident to want any Words to expose it. It were to be wished indeed that this imperious domineering Spirit, this Desire of *Lording it* over the Understandings and Consciences of Men, was confined to that Church which has most openly apostatised from the true Spirit and Genius of the Gospel: But how-

SERM. ever true it may be that this sort of Tyranny

XII. appears it its greatest Perfection in the Church of *Rome*, there would be reason to accuse us of Partiality, if we should alledge that no others are chargeable with any Share of it. There have been always too many among those, who have professed to throw off the Corruptions of that Church, who have been fond of retaining the usurped Power of it; who have in Words indeed disclaimed Infallibility, but have acted as if they were really possessed of it; who have been for making their own Judgment, even in very difficult and abstruse Points, a Rule to their Fellow-Christians, and imposing it upon them, not only by severe Censures and Reproaches, and an Exclusion from their Society; but likewise, when it has been in their power, by many heavy temporal Inconveniences. The Claim of this Authority is more peculiarly absurd and inexcusable in any who call themselves *Protestants*, as it overturns the Foundation, upon which the Reformation stands: The *Papists* can consistently with the other parts of their Scheme exercise this spiritual Dominion over the Minds of Men; but Protestants can never pretend to it, without falling under the Shame of deserting the Principles upon which they must

must necessarily defend themselves against S E R M.
their *Popish* Adversaries, as well as acting XII
in direct opposition to the Nature and De-
sign of Christianity.

3. I observe, *that it is the Right and Duty of Christians to judge for themselves in all Points of Religion, and not to depend upon the Authority of any Men for what they receive and believe in it.* This Observation is a natural Consequence from the two foregoing ones: For if a Disposition to search for the Truth in matters of Religion, be one of the most generous and laudable Qualities which Mankind can be possessed of; if the sacred Writers have highly approved and commended it; if the primitive Founders of Christianity exacted no implicit Submission from their Followers, but always exhorted them to prove or try all things which they made parts of their Religion, and to admit nothing as such, which their Understandings were not satisfied was true; it plainly follows that every Christian may judge and reason freely about all Doctrines which are now proposed to him, and may insist upon obtaining a rational conviction of the Truth of them, before he receives them, without being guilty of any Disrespect to the Persons who inculcate them. This is a Privilege which is very fully granted and confirm-

SERM.ed to Men by the Gospel. But the Right
XII. of private Judgment in Religion may be
proved by Arguments prior to any that can
be brought from Revelation; even from Men's
being endowed with rational Faculties, it
being absurd to suppose that these have been
given not to be used, or to be used only about
Trifles, while they are never to be employed
in matters of the greatest moment and con-
sequence; and from the Impossibility of
Men's thinking and judging either as they
please themselves, or as others may direct
and command them, or any otherwise than
according to the Evidences of things appear-
ing to their Reason and Understanding; so
that, however they may from several Causes
neglect to make a proper Inquiry into Reli-
gion, and however they may conceal or dis-
semble their Opinions, yet, some private Sen-
timents they must always have about it,
which if they were ever so willing, they
can never part with or alienate. It is farther
evident that Men must inquire and judge for
themselves in Religion, that their Faith may
have any thing in it that is praise-worthy,
and that their Religion may be pleasing and
acceptable to God. The Assent which we
give to the Truth of Propositions, is univer-
sally allowed to be a thing altogether indiff-
ferent

ferent in its Nature, and is never accounted either morally good or evil. Faith can only then be spoken of as a Virtue, when it proceeds from a diligent, honest and impartial Examination of things, when it is the Result of a right Use and Application of our rational Powers, and of our sincere Endeavours to know the Mind and Will of God, in order to our pleasing him and our performing our Duty. From these good Qualities, which are always the Principles of a true Faith, and its Efficacy to form a virtuous Temper in us, the whole Worth and Value of it is derived; and it would be very absurd to suppose that Almighty God would regard our embracing even the true Religion, when it is only Chance, Custom, or Education, which has determined us to embrace it, when we have never duely attended to the Evidences of it, and have no inward Sense of the Goodness and Excellency of it, more than we should have had of any false and superstitious Religion, which from the same Causes we might very easily have received. A deliberate Approbation and Choice of Religion is the very Life and Soul of it, without which it is only an empty Sound, and cannot be of the least significancy. It is therefore abundantly evident, that Men not only

SERM. may, but ought to form the best Judgment
 XII. that they can of Religion; that they should
 be Believers from a rational Persuasion and
 Conviction, and serve God from an inward
 Approbation and Love of their Duty. This
 is necessary to their having any thing that can
 at all be called Religion.

From what has been said upon this Head,
 an Inference, which has been already made is
 farther confirmed, that the use of Force for
 propagating Religion is utterly unjust; because
 it is a Violation of one of the unalienable and
 most important Rights of Men, and prevents
 their inquiring into the Grounds and Rea-
 sons of Religion, without which, there can
 be no such thing as a rational Religion, nor
 any Merit in believing. This therefore is
 what every one, who understands and values
 either the Liberties of Men, or the true In-
 terest of Christianity, will always discounte-
 nance and oppose. It is certain indeed that
 many voluntarily abridge themselves of
 their Liberty, and neglect to inquire into Re-
 ligion, when there is no Danger to be ap-
 prehended from their doing it: This is true
 not only of the generality of the lower Sort
 of People in free Countries, whose Circum-
 stances in Life may perhaps plead something
 of an Excuse for them; but of many in
 higher

higher Stations, who might be supposed, by SERM.
means of better Instruction and a more ge- XII.
nerous Conversation, to be above the In-
fluence of vulgar Prepossessions and Supersti-
tions, and disposed to use their own Under-
standings in judging of an Affair of so much
Importance as Religion : Nay even of those
who profess to be Advocates for Liberty, and
affect nothing so much as the Character of
free and impartial Inquirers, and would scorn
to have it thought that their Understandings
were byassed or enslaved by any Men, there
are not a few, who think either very super-
ficially about Religion, or with manifest pre-
judices against the Foundations and Princi-
ples of all true Religion ; who notwithstand-
ing their confident Pretences to a generous
way of thinking, and an uncommon large-
ness of Mind, appear to be guided by Pas-
sion, and Interest, and a Deference to the
Judgment of some eminent Leaders, rather
than by Reason, in many of their religious
Inquiries ; to be both hasty in embracing
wrong Opinions, and obstinate in defending
them, even by very unfair and disingenuous
Methods of Argument. This Neglect of
inquiring fairly into the Principles of Reli-
gion is in some degree criminal in all Men ;
and it is more especially criminal in those,
who

SERM. who have full Leisure and Opportunity to

XII. go through with such an Inquiry, and may go through with it, without the Fear of any Inconveniencies. To neglect inquiring in these Circumstances must proceed from a great Defect in all generous and good Principles, and a sottish Indifference about the most important Interests of Mankind.

Before I quit this Subject, it will not, perhaps, be improper, for preventing Mistakes, just to take notice, that though it is the undoubted Privilege and the Duty of every Man to judge for himself in Religion; yet it does not follow that he is to act in pursuance of his private Judgment and Sense of things, in all Affairs relating to Religion. In Cases where he apprehends himself to be under a moral Obligation, he must indeed immoveably adhere to his own Judgment, and can never act contrary to it, without the utmost Prostitution and Corruption: But in things which appear to him to be indifferent, he must often comply with the Sentiments of others, and fall in with the received Usages and Customs of the Society to which he belongs, though these should not happen to be exactly conformable to his own Notions and Opinions. This sort of Condescension is perfectly agreeable both to the Directions

tions and Examples which are proposed to us **SERM.**
by Christianity, and is in some measure ne- **XII.**
cessary for maintaining the Order and Har-
mony of Society, and rendering a Man use-
ful in it. It must however be observed,
that Discretion must be always used by us,
in the Condescensions that we make even in
indifferent matters, and that we must never
carry our Compliances so far as to let Reli-
gion sink under the Weight of the Ceremonies,
which superstitious or ill-designed Men, under
the notion of Decency and Order, or any other
pretence, may introduce into it, and to be turn-
ed by them into a piece of lifeless Pageantry :
This we know has been, and is still the case
of Christianity in many Countries; and where-
ever this falls out, it becomes the Duty of
Men to refuse a Submission to those Usages,
which bring so great Destruction upon Re-
ligion, even tho' every one of them con-
sidered singly, should be such, as they might
innocently enough comply with.

4. The last Observation which I shall make
is, *that a sincere and impartial Inquiry into
the Principles of Religion, will issue in a Con-
viction of the Truth and Certainty of them.* It
may indeed be justly presumed, since Religion
is necessary for the Happiness of Men,
that the Knowledge of it would be always
attainable

SERMON attainable by them, in an honest and diligent
 XII improvement of their natural Faculties, and
 the Advantages which Providence affords them
 for inquiring into the Grounds and Principles
 of it: The contrary can never be supposed
 without reflecting very highly both upon the
 Goodness and Justice of God. Accordingly
 we find, with respect to natural Religion,
 that all the main Principles of it, are so very
 clear and evident, that there is none who
 searches into them, with any tolerable Serious-
 ness and Attention, that can ever fail to give
 his Assent to the Truth of them. Thus, that
 there is a great and essential Difference be-
 tween the Actions called morally good, and
 those accounted morally evil; that the one
 sort of Actions are suited to the Frame of
 human Nature, approved by our Conscien-
 ces, and tend both to our Dignity and Happi-
 ness; and that the other kind of Actions are
 quite contrary to the tendency of Nature and
 the Suggestions of Conscience, and depress us
 into both a contemptible and miserable State;
 and that therefore the one sort are to be per-
 formed, and the other to be avoided by us;
 are Principles which every one may be easily
 convinced of from what he feels in his own
 Heart, and the most common and obvious
 Reflections that he makes upon the Conduct
 and

and Duty of inquiring into Religion.

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and Affairs of Mankind. Again, that there is a perfectly wise, powerful, holy, and good Mind existing, who gave being to the Universe, and still supports and governs it, who takes particular notice of the Affairs of Mankind, and delights in their Virtue and good Conduct, and is displeased with their Wickedness, and who both can and will make them feel the Effects of his Favour or Condemnation, is likewise a Truth for which we have such abundant Evidence from the Frame of Nature, particularly from our own Constitution, that it is not to be imagined that there are any Persons of common Sagacity and Fairness of Mind, who do not readily embrace and acknowledge it. Farther, that this Life is not the whole Period of the Existence of Men, but that upon leaving this World we are to appear in a more important Scene, where we shall be placed in a State either of Dignity and Happiness, or of Disgrace and Punishment, according to our good or bad Conduct here; is a Principle which may be so strongly inferred from the Nature and Faculties of the human Soul, is so agreeable to our Notions of the Divine Perfections, to the Order of the Universe, and to the natural Hopes and Expectations of Mankind, that whoever attentively and impartially considers it,

SERM. it, must look upon it as a thing exceedingly
 XII. probable at least, the Belief of which should,
 in all reason, have the greatest Influence upon
 the Hearts and Lives of Men.

Again, with respect to revealed Religion ;
 tho' the Foundations of this may not per-
 haps be thought so clear and firm, as the
 fundamental Principles of natural Religion
 are ; yet there is still so much to be alledged
 in behalf of it, particularly of Christianity, as
 must make it appear highly credible in the
 Judgment of a serious and impartial Enqui-
 rer. The Evidences of the Truth and Di-
 vinity of the Gospel, at the time of the first
 Publication of it, were so very strong and full,
 that no Persons of unprejudiced honest Minds
 could stand out against the Force of them :
 All who fairly considered the excellent Doc-
 trine delivered by our Saviour, who observed
 how exactly the Prophecies of the Old Testa-
 ment were fulfilled in him, and attended to
 the mighty Works which both he and his
 Apostles did, in confirmation of their Divine
 Commission and Authority, immediately
 took upon them the Profession of Christianity :
 This is evident not only from the case of the
Jews of Berea, but likewise from a multi-
 tude of other Instances that occur in the Hi-
 story

story of the Gospel. And though it must be SERM.
owned that the Evidence of the Truth of the XII.

Gospel at present, is not so apt to make an Impression upon the Mind, as that sensible and awakening Evidence of it, which those Persons had, who were the Ear and Eye-Witnesses of the Doctrines and Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles; yet since an Account of these has been conveyed to us in the History of the New Testament, and we have as great or a greater Assurance of the Truth of this History, than we have of the Truth of any equally ancient Histories which are most firmly believed; this surely may be sufficient with fair and equitable Men to establish the Truth and Divine Institution of our Religion. I know indeed that Christianity has been so miserably disguised and corrupted with the Follies and Superstitions that have been mixed with it, that it is hard, in many Cases, even for honest Minds to discern its real Goodness and Excellency; and that the great Supports which it receives from the Miracles of *Christ* and his Apostles have been in some measure weakened by the many lying Wonders or false Miracles which fraudulent and designing Men have attempted to obtrude upon the World: But tho' these things have done a considerable Prejudice to the Gospel,
yet

SERMON. yet they cannot justly be made Objections to the Truth and Credibility of it: For whoever pleases to enquire diligently into these matters, will find, that the Doctrine of our Saviour has been still preserved pure and uncorrupted, and free from those Mixtures and Additions, which are so apt to disgust and prejudice Men against it, in the authentick Records of this Religion, and that in the Simplicity in which it was originally delivered, it has nothing of Darkness, Confusion, or Absurdity, but is a very intelligible and rational Scheme, and of easy comprehension to a truly honest and good Mind; and that many real Miracles, or Works far exceeding all the natural Power and Art of Mankind, were performed for the Confirmation of this Doctrine; and that these are clearly distinguishable from the counterfeit Miracles of later Times, by the manner in which they were performed, having been almost all done openly and publicly, in the presence of many Witnesses, who wanted neither Skill, nor Inclination to have detected the Cheat, if there had been any, who however could object nothing against the reality of them, but what manifestly flowed from Prejudice, and had not the least Appearance of Reason to support it; and by being performed for the support of a Doctrine, which favours nothing of any worldly Design,

Design, but is solely intended for purifying S E R M.
the Hearts and Manners of Men, and prepa- XII.
ring them by that means for the noble and
sublime Enjoyments of another World.

Now from what has been advanced upon
this Head, we may see what great Encourage-
ment Men have to apply themselves to the
serious and diligent Study of Religion; be-
cause in this, more than in any other Study,
they may assure themselves of Success and Sa-
tisfaction. The Acquisition of many other
parts of Knowledge, which so much employ
the Thoughts and Care of Men, is full of
Labour and Difficulty, and often very vain
and fruitless, yielding but little either of Pro-
fit or Pleasure; so that *he who encreases that sort* Eccles. i. 18.
of Knowledge only increaseth Sorrow: Where-
as the Knowledge of Religion, at least so
much of it as is necessary, lies in a narrow
compass, is always within the reach of an
honest Mind, and will abundantly recom-
pence the pains that a Man must be at in pur-
suit of it. This therefore is the Knowledge
which we should chiefly desire, and make
the Attainment of it the great Design of our
Inquiries. The Words of two of the Apo-
cryphal Writers, represent this matter very
justly: *Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth* Wisdom
away, she is easily seen of them that love her, vi. 12--16.

SERM. and found of such as seek her; she preventeth

XII. *them that desire her, in making herself first known unto them. Whoso seeketh her early, shall have no great travel, for he shall find her sitting at his doors: To think therefore upon her is the Perfection of Wisdom, and whoso watcheth for her, shall quickly be without Care; for she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her, sheweth herself favourably to them in the ways, and meeteth them in every Thought. Come unto her, as one ploweth and soweth, and wait for her good Fruits, for thou shalt not toil much in labouring about her, but shalt eat of her Fruits right soon.*

Eccclus. vi.
19.

We may here farther take notice from what has been said upon this Subject, that Seriousness, Probity, and Diligence in inquiring into Religious and Divine Matters, are a just Foundation for entertaining a charitable Opinion of a Man, as holding all the necessary Doctrines and Principles of Religion; for these Qualifications naturally dispose and lead him to receive and acquiesce in all such Doctrines, and are the best Preservatives that can be against fundamental and dangerous Errors. And if this was but well considered, it might certainly put an end to many Controversies which are now unhappily kept on
foot;

foot, to the great disturbance of the World, and the utter reproach of the Christian Name and Profession, and dispose Men to manage any Debates which might remain among them, with such Candour, Meekness, and Humanity of Temper, as would make them, instead of doing harm, turn to the Use and Benefit of Religion and of Mankind; it being undeniable that among that great Variety of Sects and Parties, into which the Christian World is divided, there are many of almost every Denomination, who appear to be Persons of Integrity and Honesty, sincere Lovers of Truth, and fair and impartial Enquiries after it, according to their Capacities and Opportunities, and who consequently must be allowed, notwithstanding that great Diversity of Sentiments that may be among them, with respect to smaller Matters, to be all agreed in every Principle that is essential to Religion, and to have a Title to the Character and Privileges of Christians, so far as the holding any Opinions or Principles of Faith can confer that. This is what follows very obviously from the Observation that I have been illustrating, and deserves to be particularly taken notice of by Christians, and must be laid down by them, as the Foundation on which they are to proceed, if they

SERM. are ever so disposed, in extinguishing their
 XII. unnatural and scandalous Contentions, and
 establishing any thing like an universal Peace
 and Tranquillity among themselves.

Finally, Since Seriousness, Humility, Impartiality, and Probity, are the Qualifications which naturally fit and prepare us for the Reception of Divine Truths, let us take care to cultivate these Dispositions, and to carry them along with us in all our Religious Researches and Disquisitions. A vain, ludicrous, and buffooning Temper, a prejudiced, partial, proud, and sensual Mind, are utterly inconsistent with Sacred and Divine Matters, will certainly spoil our Inquiries into them, and make them come to nothing: We should therefore divest ourselves of all such Qualities before we address ourselves to the Examination of Religion, and set about that with a just Sense of the Importance of what we undertake, with a hearty Love of Truth and Goodness, and an Inclination to comply with our Duty, so far as we have already discovered it, and humble Prayers to God for his Direction and Assistance from an Apprehension of our own Weakness and Fallibility. Then may we expect to arrive at the Knowledge of all necessary Truth, when we search for it with these good Dispositions, and from the

and Duty of inquiring into Religion.

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the Blessing of God upon our honest and SERM.
humble Inquiries. For, as *David* tells us, XII.

The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear ^{Pf. xxv.}
him, and he will shew them his Covenant; the 4. 9.
Meek will be guide in Judgment, and them
that are gentle will be teach his way.

SERMON

A a 3

SERMON XIII.

Christianity capable of a rational
Defence, the Duty of every Man
to defend it, and the proper Me-
thods of supporting it.

I PETER III. 15.

Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.

IN the foregoing Verse, St. Peter speaks of the Case of Persecution, to which, the primitive Christians were assured, they would be frequently exposed, for their Adherence to their Religion: In relation to this Case, the Apostle directs the Persons to whom he addresses this Epistle, to account it a Happiness, and not a Misfortune, whenever it befall them; because they hereby had a noble
Op-

Opportunity of doing honour to their Religion, as well as procuring to themselves a most glorious Reward; and that they might the better bear the Persecutions that were to fall upon them, he advises them to raise their Minds above all the *Terror* of Men and the Fear of their Threatnings, and to *sanctify the Lord God in their Hearts*, to entertain a just Sense of the Power, Wisdom, Righteousness and Goodness of the great Governor of the World, and to depend upon these Perfections of his, as fully sufficient for supporting and comforting them in the most grievous 'Sufferings which the profession of their Religion could bring upon them; and while they thus prepared themselves for enduring Persecution with that Patience and Fortitude which became them, the Apostle exhorts them to be always ready to make a Defence or Apology for their Faith; not to suffer their Religion to lie under the Imputation of being an Imposture, as their Adversaries would account it; but to convince their Persecutors, and all who might inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of their Principles, that their *Faith* and *Hope* as Christians were not enthusiastick Imaginations, but things that had a solid Foundation in Truth and Reason; and to

SERM. do this, with that Calmness, Meekness, and
 XIII. Humility of Temper which should always
 accompany the Defence of true Religion, and
 which the Respect they owed to the Persons
 inquiring into their Principles might require
 from them. Now from this Passage several
 important and useful Observations will arise,
 which I shall make the Subject of what is
 to follow in this Discourse.

I. We may here take notice that *there is nothing absurd in the Belief and Profession of Christianity; but that our Religion will admit of a just and rational Defence.* Tho' this Observation might, perhaps, have been more necessary at the first Appearance of Christianity, when the Prejudices of Men, as might naturally be expected, ran high against it, and it was almost universally treated as a new Superstition, which owed its main support to the Ignorance and Credulity of the Persons who embraced it; yet it must always be of use for vindicating the Honour of our Religion, which has never in any Age been without some Adversaries and Opposers, which has at present a considerable Number of them, who very freely and openly declare against it, and use all their Wit and Art for overthrowing it, placing it upon a level with the most absurd Superstitions, and the most
 notorious

notorious Impostures that have ever obtained SERM.
in the World. But whatever opinion Men XII.
may entertain of the Christian Religion, the 
Foundation upon which it stands is very firm
and secure; and a Disbelief of it, however
to be accounted for, is not to be ascribed to
a Defect or Insufficiency in the rational
Proofs, which evince its Truth and Divine
Original. The Evidence for the Truth and Di-
vine Authority of the Gospel, when it was
first published to the World, was so very
clear and strong, that it was impossible for an
honest Mind to attend to this Evidence and
not be convinced by it; and therefore both
our Lord and his Apostles without scruple re-
solved the Infidelity of Men in their times,
into incurable Prejudices and corrupt Disposi-
tions of Heart, which made them wilfully
shut their Eyes against the Light of that hea-
venly Doctrine, which they found would be
the means of discovering and reproofing their
evil Deeds. And tho' the Evidence of Chri-
stianity in succeeding Ages, could not so sen-
sibly affect the Mind, as the Sight of the
Miracles that were at first wrought for the
Confirmation of the Gospel, must necessarily
have done; yet we need not doubt to say that
there has been always, and is still, Force e-
nough in it, to satisfy a capable and fair In-
quirer

SERM. quier of the Truth of our Religion. The
XIII. intrinſick Goodneſs of the Chriſtian Religion
may be as apparent as ever it was to thoſe
who take their Notions of it, not from the
peculiar Systems of its Profeſſors, which do
not indeed always preſent us with the moſt
amiable Picture of it, but from thoſe Wri-
tings which are allowed to contain the only
true and authentick Accounts of it : And the
Conſideration of the excellent End propoſed
by Chriſtianity, the purifying human Na-
ture, and raiſing it up to the higheſt Perfection
in Virtue, together with the means by which
it proſecutes this End, which are evidently
the moſt proper and efficacious that can be,
greatly preferable to whatever Philoſophy
could preſcribe for this purpoſe, muſt ex-
ceedingly recommend it to a wiſe and good
Man. That many glorious Atteſtations were
given to the Goſpel, which clearly ſhew it
to be of Divine Original and Inſtitution, will
be likewise plain to any who conſider, that
there is nothing impoſſible or contradictory
in the Accounts that we have of theſe Atteſ-
tations ; that it was a thing very worthy of
the Supreme Being to interpoſe for the Sup-
port of Chriſtianity, and give a ſolemn Sanc-
tion to ſuch an excellent and beneficial Scheme
of Religion ; and that the direct and poſitive
Evidence

Evidence for the extraordinary Facts which S E R M. attest its Divinity, is consistent, clear, and XIII.

full, much stronger than the Evidence upon which we believe any common historical Narrations, and every way sufficient to weigh down the natural Improbability of these Facts, on account of their being so very unusual and extraordinary. Whoever pleases to search into the Grounds of the Christian Religion, may, I presume, find that this summary Account of them, which is all that could be given in the compass of one short Observation, is just; and that consequently a Belief of the Gospel is not to be accounted an Effect of Weakness or Credulity in Men, that there are strong Reasons inducing us to entertain it, which are not invalidated by the Objections that are urged on the other side, which hardly at all affect what is evidently the main Support and Strength of Christianity, the Reality of the Miracles that were wrought for its Confirmation; but for the most part, are either levelled at some obscure Passages in the historical Parts of Scripture, which at this distance from the time when they were wrote, are hard to be cleared up and explained; with any particular Interpretation of which, however, the Faith of the Gospel in general seems to have but very little Connexion; or else
proceed

SERM. proceed upon such Principles and Suppositions

XIII. as are purely arbitrary and unsupported, and which, if true, would issue not only in a Denial of the Gospel, but in a Subversion of some of the chief Articles of natural Religion itself. This is a thing which many are very well convinced of, who have been at pains to examine particularly the Objections which have been advanced against the Truth and Credibility of the Christian Revelation, and may, I think, be plain to all who will with Diligence and Impartiality consider what has been frequently offered for, and against the Cause of Revealed Religion.

II. A second Observation from the Text is; *that it is the Duty of every Christian to acquaint himself with the Grounds and Reasons of his Religion, that he may be able to vindicate and defend it against the Opposition of its Adversaries.* This is plain from the Advice or Exhortation of St. Peter, which is not given particularly to one Order of Christians, but is directed in general to the whole Body of them: The same thing appears farther from the Directions of the other Apostles, requiring all to whom they wrote, *to try the*
Spirits, and to prove all things, in order to
their bolding fast what they found to be good;
 and from the Words of our Saviour himself;

1 Joh. iv

1.

1 Theff. v.

21.

Luke xii.

57.

Why

Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is SERM.
right? As our Saviour and the Apostles knew XIII.

that there was nothing in their Doctrine but what would bear an Examination, and that their Claims were all just and well supported, they could freely and confidently appeal to the Reason and Consciences of Men, and desired nothing more than that every one would judge impartially of the Truth of their Doctrine, and the Justice of their Pretensions: They never endeavoured to make or retain Profelytes upon the unmanly Foundation of an implicit Faith; they knew that there could be nothing meritorious, or honourable to their Cause, in Men's giving a blind Assent to the Gospel, that the Persons who so carelessly and hastily embraced their Doctrine could never have a just Sense of its Excellency and Importance, and would be apt, upon the first Appearance of Danger, to disgrace their Profession by renouncing it; and therefore if any were disposed to become their Disciples at all, they would have them to be such upon serious Consideration and Conviction. And if a rational Persuasion of the Truth of Christianity was at first so necessary in all who took upon them the Profession of it, I think it can hardly be alledged that time has made an Alteration in the case, or that this, which was then so much a Duty,

SERM. is now become a thing of no consequence.

XIII. An implicit Belief in any who tell us that the

Gospel is true, is still as disagreeable to the Intention of the Divine Author of it, is as mean and unworthy of a Man, and will be as ineffectual to all good Purposes as ever it was. A deliberate and fair Examination of the Reasons upon which Christianity is founded, and an Acquiescence in them, upon finding them to be valid, are necessarily presupposed in that Faith of it, which can be thought to have any virtue in it, and which will have force enough for bringing our Hearts to an universal Obedience to the Laws of our Saviour, and keeping us stedfast in the Profession of his Religion, whatever Inconveniencies and Sufferings it may happen to bring upon us. And when we really have such a Belief of the Gospel, we can hardly fail to esteem it above all things, and to have the greatest Zeal for its Interest, and shall be always prepared to defend it with Judgment, Honour, and Success against all the Surmizes and Cavils of its most subtile and powerful Adversaries.

But after all that can be said for the Necessity of every Man's inquiring into the grounds of the Christian Religion, who takes the Profession of it upon him; I know it will

be

be objected that the thing is impracticable; S E R M.
because to the making of this Inquiry a much XIII.
greater Degree of Reflection, Knowledge, and

Application is necessary than is ever to be expected in the main Body of Men. This is an Objection which has been set out with a great deal of Pomp, with different Views, and for serving opposite Causes and Interests. But after all the most plausible things that have been offered upon this head, the Matter of Fact is not as the Objection represents it: For what is there that can justly be accounted so difficult in an Inquiry into the Reasons of Christianity, that the Sagacity and Application of any plain illiterate Man, who is really in earnest in searching into a Matter of the greatest moment to him, may not be supposed able to overcome it? Such a one is certainly qualified to judge of the nature of the Christian Doctrine itself; for tho' he does not understand the Language in which that Doctrine was originally delivered, yet he may be sure that the Account which he has of it is just, at least in all material Circumstances, from the universal Concurrence of Men of Knowledge and Learning in that Point; and by comparing the Doctrine of the Gospel with the most natural Sentiments and Reasonings of his own Mind, he must perceive it to be

SER M. perfectly good, worthy of Almighty God, and
XI. I. most conducive to the Benefit and Interest of

 Mankind. He is likewise capable of examining the external Evidences of the Truth and Divinity of the Gospel; he may be satisfied that the Miracles said to have been done by *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles were really performed by them, in the same way that he is satisfied of the Truth of any ancient Facts; from the Testimony of Histories which have all the Appearances and Characters of Truth; which have been allowed to be authentick not only by Christians of all Ages and Countries, but for the most part by the Adversaries of their Religion too; against the Credit and Authority of which, nothing has ever been advanced but what with respect to any other Histories would be accounted frivolous and trifling. This is what every common Man may know, who will apply himself to the Study of Religion with a Zeal in any sort proportioned to its importance; or with the same diligence, which he uses in acquiring Skill in any of the Affairs of this World, upon which he knows his Interest greatly to depend. Indeed the Proofs and Evidences of Christianity are level to the Understanding of the meanest Person, who is at the same time unprejudiced and willing to be instructed in them,
and

and makes a proper use of the means of com-
prehending them which are always in his
power; and the reason why there are so many
implicit Believers of the Gospel in every Coun-
try where this Religion is professed, is to be
ascribed not to any insuperable Difficulties
which Men of low Capacities will meet with
in an Examination of the Grounds of their
Faith, but either to their being meanly over-
awed by an usurped Authority prohibiting
them to inquire and judge for themselves, or
to a criminal Indolence, and stupid Inattenti-
on to the things which are of the greatest ex-
cellence in themselves, and of the utmost
consequence to Mankind.

It remains then that every Man who calls
himself a Christian, is bound to inquire into
the Grounds upon which his Religion stands:
And if this be the Duty of the meanest Chri-
stian, it is still more evidently the Duty of
Christians of superior Talents, whose Obli-
gations to search into the Nature and Reasons
of their Religion increase in proportion to
the Opportunities and Advantages which they
have above common Christians for satisfying
themselves of the Truth of the Gospel, and
knowing every thing that is necessary for the
Support of it. After this, I need hardly ob-
serve that it must be most of all incumbent

S E R M. on the Ministers and Teachers of Christianity

XIII. to be well instructed in the Grounds of their Religion, and to have a clear View of all that is necessary either to prove or defend their Faith. Those who have peculiarly devoted themselves to the Work of propagating and inculcating the Doctrines of the Gospel, can never be ignorant in any matters which affect the Truth of it, without the most shameful Absurdity: Nor can they turn themselves to the Study of any thing so much as Religion, without acting quite out of Character, and misapplying their Time and Talents: The Acquisition of useful Knowledge in any kind, may be very commendable in a Minister of Religion, when it is made subservient to the great Design of his Profession, or even when it does not interfere with that; but when through a Fondness to get a Name for those Accomplishments, and those Parts of Learning which happen to be in vogue, he becomes negligent about his principal and most immediate Business, let his Abilities and Attainments be what they will, he must with them all make but a mean Figure in the Judgment of every serious and good Mind.

III. I proceed to another Reflection which arises from St. Peter's Advice in the Text, that *the proper Method of defending Christianity*

nity is by Reason and Argument, and not by SERM.
outward Violence and Compulsion. It was in XIII.
this way that the Wisdom of our Blessed Sa-
viour chose to introduce his Religion: As he
was to set up a Kingdom which is not of this Joh. xviii.
World, he made use of none of the Engines 36.
and Instruments of worldly Policy for esta-
blishing it. All that he trusted to for accom-
plishing his Design, was the Efficacy of In-
struction and Persuasion, together with the
Evidences which he produced of his Divine
Commission and Authority. If these could
not prevail upon Men to become his Disciples,
he freely allowed them to follow their own
Judgment or Inclination, without attempting
to force them into his Religion, or exposing
them to any temporal Inconveniencies on ac-
count of their Incredulity. The same Me-
thod was pursued by the Apostles, who de-
clared that *the Weapons of their Warfare were* 2 Cor. x.
not carnal, but mighty through God, who en- 4.
deavoured only by the Manifestation of the -iv. 1.
Truth to commend themselves to every man's
Conscience in the sight of God; to approve
themselves and their Doctrine by Pureness, by -vi. 4, 6,
Knowledge, by Long-suffering, by Love un- 7.
feigned, by the Word of Truth, by the Power
of God, by the Armour of Righteousness, and
who have laid it down as a Rule which is in-

SERM. variably to be observed by all who would at

XIII. any time introduce or propagate the Knowledge of Christianity, that *the Servant of the*

2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all Men,

apt to teach, patient, in Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging the Truth. In this manner the primitive Founders and Preachers of the Gospel thought fit to introduce it among Men; and thus our Religion made a most surprizing and glorious Progress, spreading itself quickly through all the most famous Countries of the Earth, gaining an infinite Number of Converts of all Ranks and Conditions, triumphing over the Rage of Persecution, and, what was still more unconquerable, over the Prejudices and evil Passions of Mankind. It would certainly have been extremely for the Interest and Honour of Christianity, if this had been the only way of propagating it that had been ever thought on; if Men had been contented to let it always prevail by its own Light and Force, without calling in any foreign Aids for its Support, which instead of contributing to its growth and advancement, have been the means of obstructing and depressing it, and diminishing it greatly in the Esteem and Regard of the World. For when the original
Method

Method of propagating the Gospel came to SERM.
be laid aside, and a new sort of religious Po- XIII.
licy took place among Christians; when the
Magistrates of this World became the chief
Patrons and Guardians of the Faith, and were
always ready to revenge every Instance of In-
fidelity, or whatever happened to be called
so, with the utmost Severity; when the
spreading the Doctrine of Christ was made
the Occasion and Pretence of disturbing the
Rights, and invading the Liberties, and Pos-
sessions of Men, of involving them in cruel
Wars and Bloodshed, and of bringing the
greatest Confusion and Misery into all human
Affairs, what was the Consequence? The
Gospel could no longer retain its former Pow-
er and Influence, and instead of being treat-
ed with the Respect and Favour which it once
met with, and which upon its own account
it always highly deserved, it became the Ob-
ject of the Hatred and Aversion of most of
the different Denominations and Sects of
Mankind. And indeed what else is to be ex-
pected, but that all attempts to establish and
maintain Christianity by Violence must tend
to its prejudice, as they unavoidably create
Suspensions in the Minds of those who have
no Opportunity of acquainting themselves
with the real Strength of it, that it is not

SERM. true, since the Friends of it dare not trust to

XIII. Reason for its Support, nor submit it to a free and impartial Examination; and that it cannot be from God, who can never be supposed to design any thing for a Religion to be professed by Mankind, which will not sufficiently recommend itself to them by a rational Evidence, and which is not to be propagated among them, but by Methods which are inconsistent with natural Justice, and the Peace and good Order of human Society.

It is therefore certain that the only way in which the Christian Religion can ever be propagated and defended with Success and Reputation, is by Argument and rational Persuasion; by offering the Proofs and Evidences of it to the Understandings and Consciences of Men, and leaving these to operate according to their own Weight and Influence. It is a very weak Imagination, as well as very dishonourable to the Gospel, to think that it would not be able to maintain its Ground, if the Profession of it was not enforced by penal Laws, and if Men were at full liberty to embrace or reject it, as upon Inquiry they found it to deserve their Acceptance, or not: The Experience of those times when our Religion spread farthest and flourished most, not only without the assistance of the

Terrors

Terrors of this World, but in opposition to SERM.
them all, sufficiently declares the contrary. XIII.

And may we not be convinced from what
has happened even in our own Days, that
Christianity will never suffer by the greatest
Liberty which Men can take of examining
it; that the strictest Inquiry into the Prin-
ciples and Grounds of it, will be so far from
doing it harm, that it will turn much to its
advantage? Never has the Gospel, since the
time perhaps of its first Publication, been
more warmly and boldly attacked, than it
has been by some late Adversaries, who through
the Indulgence and Equity of our Civil Go-
vernors (which is a thing extremely for their
Honour) have been permitted to produce their
shrewdest Objections against it with much
more Freedom than has been formerly known,
and who have done all that their Measure of
Wit and Learning could enable them to do
for disgracing and overturning it. But with
what Success? The Attempts of these Adver-
saries of Christianity have probably had a
bad Effect on some hasty and superficial In-
quirers, and on some Persons previously dispo-
sed to hearken to any Suggestions against a
Doctrine that is not agreeable to their In-
clinations; whereas, on the other hand, they
have raised a noble Spirit of Inquiry in many

SERM. serious Christians, and put them upon such
 XIII. an accurate Examination of their Religion,
 that the Nature of it is much more universally understood, and the Proofs of it are more fully laid open, and the Fallacies of its Adversaries are more easy to be detected than otherwise they would have been: So that the Gospel, as Truth ever must, has really gained by the free Debates which have been raised about it, and is now in a fairer way than it was before, for approving and recommending itself to sober and impartial Men, after having undergone another critical and open Tryal, and remaining unmoved against the most powerful Efforts of its Enemies.

IV. There is one Observation more which we may make from the Advice in the Text, *that with the rational Proofs which we offer in defence of Christianity, we must mix nothing of Wrath, Bitterness, and Arrogance; but should propose them all in a Spirit of Gentleness, Humility, and Love.* Every one who knows any thing of human Nature, and has had any Experience in Disputes and Controversies, must be sensible that the manner of defending a Cause is of vast importance to our succeeding in it: That Anger and Fierceness, Positiveness and Pride, Insolence and Rudeness

Rudeness will be apt to raise such Disgusts SERM.
and Prejudices against a Man, as all the Ar- XIII.
guments which he may offer, will hardly be 
able to overcome; that, on the contrary,
Calmness and Moderation, the offering our
Reasons with a Temper of Benevolence, and
the treating all Men, whatever their Senti-
ments may be, with all the Decency and Re-
spect which upon any accounts are due to
them, will naturally conciliate the Affections
of Men, and procure us at least a patient and
fair Hearing, which is one great Point in or-
der to our convincing them: So that Meek-
ness, Modesty, and Charity, are very necessa-
ry Qualities in all who appear as Advocates for
any Cause that is worth contending for; and
they are more especially necessary in those
who plead for the best of Causes, Religion;
and particularly that Religion which is all
summed up in Love; the great Design of
which is to restrain the angry Passions and
bring down the vain Imaginations of Men,
to cloath them with Humility, and to inspire
them with the tenderest Sentiments of Hu-
manity and Kindness, Long-suffering and
Forbearance towards one another. Certainly
to pretend to support the Religion of our Sa-
viour, which breathes nothing but Meekness
and Charity, in a Spirit of Wrath and
Haughtiness,

SERM. Haughtiness, is so gross a Contradiction, and
 XIII. a thing which looks so like Deceit and Im-
 posture, that it can never fail of giving great
 Scandal, and proving detrimental to the Inter-
 est of the Gospel, as it will furnish matter of
 Reproach to the avowed Adversaries of it,
 and be the means of confirming and har-
 dening Persons of unstable Minds in the Pre-
 judices which they may have taken up against
 it. Whoever therefore would acquit them-
 selves as worthy Advocates of Christianity,
 must take care to abstain from all unbecoming
 Heat and Passion, from all Insolence and
 Scurrility, from all reviling and railing at
 Men for their Infidelity; and endeavour only
 with the *Words of Truth and Soberness*, with
 a calm, meek, and benevolent Disposition,
 to convince Gainsayers, and establish them in
 the true Faith of the Gospel. To contend
 thus for Christianity, with the Spirit which
 Christianity itself inspires, is the most proba-
 ble means of serving the Cause of it, as it
 must easily satisfy Men that we have no pri-
 vate End to answer by their Conversion to it,
 that we design nothing so much as doing them
 good, by bringing them into the surest way
 of living virtuously, and obtaining the greatest
 Degree of Happiness; or, if even this Me-
 thod should have no effect for convincing an
 Adversary,

Acts xxvi.
 25.

Adversary, he who uses it, will at least have **SERM.**
the Satisfaction of reflecting that he has at- **XIII.**
tempted to defend the Gospel in a way agree-
able to its Nature, and without having con-
tributed to the Increase of the Offence which
the World has received from the intemperate
Zeal of Men, in their Debates about Re-
ligion.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

The Spiritual and Moral Liberty of Men.

JOHN VIII. 32.

*And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth
shall make you free.*

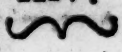
A Zeal for Liberty has been usually accounted a generous and honourable Passion, and goes a great way, in our Age and Country at least, in recommending a Man to the Esteem and Favour of the Publick : And without all question the Endeavours which have been used to promote and establish both the religious and civil Liberties of Mankind, have been very worthy and commendable ; and it is to be hoped, and greatly desired, that the Spirit of Freedom which now prevails among ourselves in mat-
ters

ters of Religion, as well as of civil Polity, SERM.
will not be suffered to perish or decay. But XIV.
with all the Zeal which has been expressed
for the Liberties of the Publick, and with all
the Ambition which Men may have to be
thought Patrons of them, there has appeared
a most wretched Indifference and Negligence
in maintaining another sort of Liberty, which
though private and personal, is really of greater
Excellence in itself, and of more Importance
to every Individual, than any other kind
of Liberty whatsoever. By this, you will easily
apprehend, that I mean that which is called
the moral Liberty of a Man, or the Freedom
of the Soul from the Influence of all evil Desires
and Affections, and its independence upon
external Objects and Accidents; an Ability
to do whatever appears to the deliberate
Judgment of our Minds and Consciences to
be right, without being controuled or restrained
by any of the Appetites and Passions of
our Nature, which may incline us another
way, and without being stopped or interrupted
in our good Course, by any of the various
Events and Occurrences of this mutable Scene
of things.

It is this Liberty which our Saviour promises
to his *Disciples* in the Text, as the consequence
of their *knowing the Truth*, or their
receiving

SERM. receiving and embracing his Doctrine, as is
 XIV. plain, from the following Verses, where our
 Lord gives the *Jews* to understand, upon
 occasion of their boasting of the freedom of
 their Descent and their external Condition,
 from whence they inferred that they wanted
 no Liberty from him ; that as they were wil-
 ful and habitual Sinners, they were in a state
 of the most miserable Servitude, and that a
 Deliverance from the Dominion of Sin, and
 an inward Liberty of the Mind, was what he
 intended to confer upon his Followers; which
 is indeed the most excellent of all sorts of Li-
 berty, and without which, no Man, let his
 external Liberty be what it will, can ever be
 accounted free.

Now as our Blessed Saviour intends to bring
 us into the State of spiritual Liberty ; as his
 Religion contributes most effectually to this
 purpose, by reviving and reinforcing such ex-
 cellent Doctrines and Principles as have the
 plainest Tendency to kill and destroy all those
 Lusts and Corruptions in us which captivate
 and enslave the Mind ; and to engage us to
 the Virtues from the Exercise of which the
 Strength and Freedom of the Soul immedi-
 ately flow, and by offering us a divine Assis-
 tance to cooperate with our Endeavours in
 throwing off the Yoke of Vice, and for ar-
 riving

riving at a State of perfect Freedom; I shall, S E R M.
for assisting us in attaining to this State of XIV.
Liberty, which is so agreeable to the Design 
of our Religion, and which is withal a thing
of the greatest value in itself, *First*, Con-
sider a little more particularly the Nature
of this spiritual and moral Liberty. *Secondly*,
Offer some Arguments to animate our Zeal in
acquiring and maintaining it. *Thirdly*, Lay
down the proper Methods to obtain and pre-
serve it.

I. As for the *First* of these Particulars ;
After the Account which has been already
given of this inward Liberty of Men, there
would be no occasion for making an inquiry
into the Nature of it, were it not for the un-
happy Mistakes and Prejudices of some, which
make them fancy themselves to be in the most
uncontrouled and free State of Mind, when
they are plainly under the most ignominious
and wretched Bondage. Whoever reflects up-
on the several Powers, Principles, and Dis-
positions belonging to the human Nature,
may easily see that some of them are evident-
ly designed for superintending and governing
the rest ; that our Appetites and Passions are
naturally put in a state of Subjection, while
our Powers of Conscience and Reason are ad-
vanced

SERM. vanced to a Place of Authority ; that the Judg-
 XIV. ment and Determination of these higher Prin-
 ciples are most properly our Judgment and
 Choice ; that consequently the true inward
 Freedom of Men consists in their being able
 to act as their Conscience and Reason, after
 a mature and impartial Consideration of
 things, direct them ; without being subject to
 any hindrance or controul either from the Mo-
 tions of the inferior Principles and Disposi-
 tions of their Nature, or from the Influence
 of outward Objects and Temptations. As in a
 civil State and a political Capacity, Men are
 free, when they are under no Government and
 Direction but that of Laws which they them-
 selves have made, or which they have appro-
 ved and voluntarily consented to ; so in regard
 of their inward Condition, and considering
 them as rational and moral Agents, they are
 free, when the deliberate Judgment and Elec-
 tion of their Minds are the only Rule of their
 Conduct, and they can always act according
 to this Rule easily and without interruption.

But however clear and just this Notion of
 inward Liberty may be, there are many who
 will by no means agree to it ; who are so far
 from imagining that to be a free State of Mind
 in which Men act only according to the Dic-
 tates of Conscience and Reason, that they look
 upon

upon it to be a State of the most grievous Restraining and Confinement; who in order to a Man's enjoying true Freedom and Independence of Spirit, think it altogether necessary that full scope should be given to every Desire, Passion, and Inclination in his Heart, that whichever one of these happens for the time to be strong and craving, should be immediately gratified, and that every one of them should be indulged and pleased in its turn, without any sort of check or controul whatsoever. But surely nothing but great Ignorance and the most superficial View of things, or the most wretched Prejudices in favour of Vice, can ever make any judge thus. A State of the wildest Uproar and Confusion in Society, where there is no Order, no Appearance of a wise and steady Administration of Government, where the Law to which all must submit is only the Will of the Party which chances to triumph for a Day, may as well be called a State of civil Liberty, as a Man's acting in pursuance of the Motions of blind tumultuary Passions, can be called the Freedom of his Soul. If vicious Men could indeed bring their Passions to agree with one another, or if having any one remarkably strong in them, they would keep all the rest in subjection to this; and if they

SERM. could at the same time extinguish their Sense
 XIV. of moral Good and Evil, and extirpate the
 Powers of Reflection and Reason out of their
 Nature, they might perhaps in this case lay
 claim to some kind of Liberty within them-
 selves, thought it would not be properly the
 Liberty of Men: But while this is plainly im-
 possible to be done by them; while they ap-
 pear in fact to be always at a great variance with
 themselves, while they are torn and distract-
 ed with many different Motions and Tenden-
 cies within, and their external Conduct in
 consequence of this is full of Irresolution, In-
 consistency, and Contradiction; while their
 most favourite Passions are upon many occa-
 sions condemned and checked by the authori-
 tative Sentence and Admonition of their Con-
 sciences, and they are obliged to stop short in
 their evil Pursuits; while in their calm Hours
 they must see and acknowledge their Duty,
 and yet in their ordinary Life have no strength
 to adhere to it; while they thus *do what they*
 Rom. vii. *allow not*, and even *what they hate, and what*
 15, 19, 23 *they would, they cannot do*; while *there is a*
Law in their Members warring against the
Law of their Minds, and bringing them into
Captivity to the Law of Sin which is in their
Members; certainly none who consider these
 things, and have any Notion of what they
 speak

Speak of, can ever say that such Men enjoy SERM.
any sort of Liberty of Mind at all. They are XIV.
plainly in a state of most severe Drudgery, and
the most abject inward Slavery; a Slavery
more real and vile than any that those Wret-
ches undergo, who must every day wear the
outward Badges of their Captivity, and groan
in the Chains of their Oppressors.

It is certain then that we can have no Li-
berty of Soul in following all the Motions
of our Inclinations and Passions indifferently;
on the contrary, the Result of that will be
always a cruel Bondage: While Men from
such Extravagance and Licentiousness *promise* 2 Pet: ii:
themselves Liberty, they soon find that *they* ^{19.}
are the Servants of Corruption. But if we
would be inwardly and spiritually free, we
must be able to govern our Affections and Pas-
sions by the cool Dictates of the superiour
Principles of our Nature, to proceed in the
Exercise of them, or to restrain and suspend
their Operation, as our Conscience and Rea-
son, after due Consideration, shall direct; to
make the Judgment of these leading Faculties
in our Frame the constant Rule of Action to
us, and to pursue it steadily and uniformly,
without being diverted either by any inward,
Byass, or by any of the external Obstacles that
we may meet with in the good Course to
C c 2 which

SERM. which these Faculties will guide and direct us.

XIV. When we can do this, we may be said, in the

Words of St. Paul, which he applied to another case, to be *delivered from the Bondage of*

Rom. viii. *Corruption*, and to enjoy the glorious Liberty
21. *of the Children of God*; we are subject to no

inward Force or Tyranny, our Conduct is quite voluntary and free, and we are in the most uncontrouled and independent State of Mind that can be.

II. I proceed now to offer some Arguments to excite and animate our Zeal in acquiring and maintaining this spiritual and moral Liberty.

I. Let us consider, how necessary and of how much importance, our being possessed of this Liberty is, for maintaining the Dignity of our Nature and a manly Character. Slavery of every kind is extremely ignominious and disgraceful: To submit even to that which is external and political, which affects only the Body and its Concerns, argues a degenerate and ignoble Mind, which is insensible of the true Dignity of Man, and of the Advantages and Rights which he is born to, and which it would be his Glory to assert and vindicate at any hazard and expence against every Invader and Usurper of them; and which is actuated only by the lowest Principles, by Timidity, and such a mean Attachment to Life and the poor pre-

carious

carious Advantages that may be held at the S E R M.
Pleasure of an absolute Lord, as makes a Man XIV.

content, not only to give up his most important Privileges as a Member of Society; but to crouch and bend in the most pusillanimous and abject manner, as often as the Commands of his imperious Master require him to do so. And yet, ignominious and dishonourable as the submitting to the Yoke of external Slavery may be, the submitting to the Yoke of internal Slavery is still more so; for the moral and rational Powers of Men, being both the glory of our Nature, and the proper guides of our Life, which are so far from being designed for Servitude and Subjection, that they are naturally invested with Authority and the right of Government, if we can suffer these to be contradicted and overruled by blind undistinguishing Passions, to be suppressed and born down by mere brutal Violence, to be corrupted by the Allurements of external Objects, or overcome by the Accidents of Life; if we are willing that these most noble Powers of our Nature should be thus degraded and debased, and reduced to a state of vile Captivity, we must certainly be thought to have lost every manly Sentiment and Affection, to have sunk even below the meanness of Brutes, and to have rendered

SERMON. dered ourselves as contemptible as it is possible for us to be. We may after this try, if we please, to acquire a Character from our Zeal for the Interest of a Party, or from a seeming Attachment to publick Good, or from some other commendable Qualities which on some occasions we may be able to assume; or to raise it on the Merit of those adventitious Ornaments and external Advantages, which, perhaps, we may have obtained as the rewards of prostituting our true Dignity and Honour, and parting with our inward Liberty: But all Attempts of this kind will be vain; for, whatever Flatterers or Persons who have some little ends to serve by us may think fit to suggest, we shall soon find that we have lost all real Esteem, and that we are universally and utterly disregarded and despised, and, which is still worse, we ourselves shall be sensible, that we very well deserve to be so. If therefore we have a mind to maintain our manly Dignity, and to keep a Character either with the World or ourselves, it is absolutely necessary to take care of the Liberty of our Minds; if we are already in full possession of it, to use all Endeavours to continue and perpetuate it; or if we have lost it in any measure, to do all in our power to restore it, and preserve it for the future

future intire and inviolable: When we do SERM.
this, we shall not only secure ourselves from XIV.
falling into any Meanness, and as the Consequence of that from Contempt, but shall appear in a most engaging Light; as Persons who have a just Notion of the Excellence of the Human Nature, and possess such a noble Greatness and Fortitude of Soul, as enable us to triumph over the most powerful and dangerous Enemies, and to assert our most valuable and important Privilege with Firmness and Success. If a steady and uniform Zeal for publick Liberty, and the common Welfare which depends on that, is always a great beauty in a Man's Character, and is accounted a clear indication of the good make and strength of his Mind; surely a fixed Zeal for a more noble kind of Liberty, and upon which every one has more depending than any share which he can have of the publick Happiness, and which it is more difficult for a Man to be always attentive to, must be allowed to be still a greater Excellency, and a stronger Argument of a generous and manly Spirit in us. Indeed a resolute maintenance of the Freedom and Independency of our Minds is plainly the way to display our Magnanimity and Courage to the best advantage, and will reflect a great deal of honour upon

SERM. us in all Conditions and Circumstances: It
 XIV. will very much adorn us in Prosperity, and
 set off all our good Qualities and Advantages;
 and it will make our Merit very conspicuous
 in an adverse Fortune: We may fall into Dis-
 tress, we may have Poverty, we may have
 Persecution, we may have Afflictions of vari-
 ous kinds to encounter; but while we remain
 perfect Masters of ourselves, while we appear
 to be superiour to all our Troubles, and can in
 the midst of them calmly and deliberately
 pursue what appears to us to be right, our
 Distresses will be so far from obscuring us, that
 they will add to the lustre of our Characters,
 and we shall be not only loved, but highly ad-
 mired and revered by all who know us.

2. As another Argument to excite our
 Zeal in acquiring this spiritual Liberty, let us
 consider that it will be a Foundation for our
 practising all the most noble and heroick
 Virtues. As an inward Slavery is itself a state
 of Vice and Corruption, and makes way for
 our committing the most enormous Acts of
 Wickedness; so the reverse of it, a clear In-
 dependance or Freedom of Soul, both suppo-
 ses us to have already made a considerable pro-
 gress in Virtue, and prepares and disposes us
 to go on to Perfection. As this Freedom
 springs from some of the most plain and sim-

Heb. vi. 1.

ple Virtues, so it not only has a reciprocal SERM.
good Influence upon these, but leads to all the XIV.
Virtues which are most generous and hero-
ick in their nature. For when our Minds
are released from all Violence and Restraint,
and we can without difficulty follow the calm
Dictates of our superior Faculties, which will
always direct and prompt us to the most ge-
nerous Behaviour, what is there that is either
worthy or great, that may not be expected
from us? The most amiable and sublime Pie-
ty, the most inflexible Integrity, the most
exact and impartial Justice, the most brave
Contempt of the World, the most lively Zeal
in doing good, the most noble publick Spi-
rit, and the most steady Attachment to Li-
berty and all the other valuable Interests of
Mankind, will naturally appear in our Con-
duct, as the Consequences of our possessing
an inward Freedom of Soul, and having
the Government of our Actions entirely in
ourselves. Virtue being of all things most
agreeable to our Nature, when the accidental
Obstacles to the Practice of it arising from our
Prejudices and evil Dispositions are removed,
and when our discerning Faculties are always
pure and clear, and our Affections are obedi-
ent to their Directions, we shall certainly ar-
rive at great degrees of all excellent and praise-
worthy

SERM. worthy Qualities, and indeed at the Perfection of Goodness, so far as it is attainable by us in this present State. So that if we would improve in those Qualities and Dispositions which we must above all things approve and admire, which we must esteem as our own true Excellence, as well as the highest Excellence and Glory of all rational Natures, we should endeavour to secure our spiritual Freedom, and to enjoy it in as great perfection as it is possible for us to do. This will be a sure Introduction to the most worthy and becoming Conduct, a Foundation upon which we may raise a noble Superstructure of the most solid and shining Virtue. And this is indeed the only Foundation upon which Virtue, whether private or publick, can be securely and universally supported: For however there are such Principles in human Nature, as will always produce several good Actions in the generality of Men, in the most corrupt State in which they happen to be; however some Tempers may be carried by a sort of Enthusiasm towards some particular kind of Virtue; and however the Engagements and Heat of a Party may sometimes keep Men well-affected to the Publick when otherwise they would not be so; yet there is no such thing as an uniform Course of moral
Good-

Goodness to be expected from any Men who ^{SERM.} have lost their inward Liberty, nor can they ^{XIV.} be depended on for continuing to practise it in time to come, even in the partial manner in which they may have formerly practised it; a new Situation, a Change of Temper or of Interest, which may easily happen to them, may make them alter their Conduct in those particulars in which it has been most approved, and their Behaviour in general must, at best, be irregular and unequal, partaking more of Virtue or of Vice, in proportion to the Degree in which they retain or have lost the command of themselves, and according as good or evil Passions happen to be strong or weak in their Hearts. The possessing an inviolate Liberty of Mind is therefore a necessary Security for our persevering in a uniformly good Course, and will withal be a Root from which every thing amiable and worthy will naturally spring: So that whoever proposes to excel in Virtue, and to adorn himself with all noble Qualities, must guard against all Breaches upon his inward Freedom, and look to the Preservation of it with the utmost Jealousy and Care, as a thing that is both his Defence against the Infection of Vice, and the Source of the Order and Regularity, and of the most generous and honourable Conduct of his Life.

SERM. 3. Let us consider of what consequence

XIV. the maintaining our spiritual Liberty is to the
 ~~~~~ Happiness and true Enjoyment of Life. Publick Liberty has not a greater influence upon the Prosperity of the Community, than this spiritual Liberty has upon the Welfare of every particular Man. The good Effect of it upon the Happiness of Life may be in a great measure plain from what has been already said. For as the possessing this Liberty is both the Foundation of maintaining the Dignity of our Nature and the best Security for a virtuous Conduct, it must consequently be the Spring of the purest and most divine Pleasures of which we have any Experience, and which are of so much importance that without them we should have but very little relish of our Beings, and all our Enjoyments would become flat and insipid: And besides these most noble Pleasures, which are the more remote Consequences of enjoying an inward Freedom of Mind, there is a great deal of Ease and Tranquillity which immediately results from it. To be resolved and determined in any Affairs of great consequence, and to be able to act according to our Determinations, and to be above the Assaults of ill Accidents, or the Power of what is called Fortune, is naturally a State of Calmness and Serenity, of Rest

Rest and Repose of Mind, as the contrary SERM.  
XIV.  
is always a state of inward Perplexity and Disturbance. As therefore the Men who maintain their spiritual Liberty, are both fixed as to the principal Design of Life, and can with facility pursue the Measures which they judge to be most proper for conducting it aright; as they are likewise armed against all adverse Occurrences, they must of course remain in a state of Harmony and Peace, free from that Remorse and Self-dislike, from that Dissonancy and Distraction which must unavoidably disquiet the Minds of those who are governed by no steady Principles, who are acted by various and contradictory Passions, and apt to be disconcerted by every unforeseen Accident or unlucky Event which happens to them in the World. A State of inward Liberty therefore being naturally a State of Happiness and Peace, the Preservation of this Liberty being a thing altogether necessary for the comfortable Enjoyment of our Lives, we will surely, if we regard only our own Quiet and Ease, endeavour by all means to secure and maintain it.

III. I shall consider the proper Methods of acquiring and maintaining our spiritual Liberty.



SERM. I. The first and most necessary Rule to be

XIV. observed in this Case, is to exercise a constant

Temperance and Moderation of our Desires towards external Objects. The private Liberty of Men has the same Foundation and Support with that of the publick. As the Liberty of Society has no Foundation whereon it can securely stand, but the Sobriety, Modesty, Parsimony, and Frugality of the Members of it, which both cherish a Spirit of publick Liberty, and put Men above all Temptations to give it up; as the contrary Vices of Luxury and Effeminacy, Vanity and Extravagance must always in time prove the Destruction of the Freedom of any People, among whom they universally prevail; so the personal Liberty of Men depends chiefly upon the Moderation of their private Appetites and Desires, upon their following the Simplicity of Nature, and their cultivating duely the Virtues of Modesty and Temperance, and will certainly be ruined by their suffering a Passion towards Pleasures or any external Objects to grow strong and violent in their Hearts. When a Man indulges no unnatural or extravagant Passions, and proportions his Desires and Inclinations to the real Worth and Value of their several Objects, he has conquered the greatest Difficulties in the acquisition  
of

of his spiritual Liberty, or he has rather en-  
tered upon the Exercise of it, and may hope  
for all the Advantages and excellent Fruits of

SERM.  
XIV.

it, in an uniformly virtuous and happy Life. Temperance has been sometimes called the nursing Mother of the other Virtues, and very properly, both as it has a direct Influence in preparing and disposing us for the Practice of them, and as it produces in us that moral Freedom of Mind which is naturally fruitful of all Goodness, and the best Security for our steadiness in a virtuous Course. The first thing therefore to be learned by all who would become spiritually and morally Free, is the Method of bringing their Appetites and Affections under a due Discipline; how to have their Desires and Aversions well placed, to prevent their being hurried away with the first violent Impulses of their Passions, and to restrain all the Extravagancies and Excesses of them, and to habituate them to such constant subjection, that it may be always in their power to controul and govern them. This I know will be a hard task to those of us who have never been accustomed to such a Practice, who have perhaps some Propensities and Passions naturally strong, and may have both these and others heightened and confirmed through Habits of long Indulgence, and the  
false

SERM. false and fantastick Notions which we entertain of Life. But the Consideration of the

XIV.  Necessity of undertaking it for rescuing ourselves from a state of the vilest and most miserable Slavery, and for attaining to a noble Liberty and Enlargement of Soul, and all the happy Consequences of that, if well fixed in our Minds, may both prevail upon us to attempt it, and enable us to overcome all the Difficulties of it; may make us calm enough to examine the Nature and Tendency of our Inclinations and Passions before we give way to them, whether they are in themselves innocent and allowable, and in a just proportion to the known value of their Objects; and may likewise make us resolute to contradict and check them when they would carry us to any thing disapproved by the higher Principles in our Minds: Which Method, if persevered in, must be sufficient in time to reduce our Passions to a good order; for though at first we may find them very fierce and ungovernable, yet when we have acquired such a Composure and Firmness of Mind as to be able before we comply with them to take a deliberate View of them, and steadily refuse to gratify them, however importunate, in every forbidden Instance, we shall immediately break the Strength of them, and shall subdue them by



by degrees, so that they will at last gently submit to the Yoke, and obey the Dictates of our superior Faculties without reluctance. I have only this farther to observe upon this head, that as this Discipline is in general necessary with respect to all our Passions, for the Acquisition and Preservation of our spiritual Liberty, so it is more especially necessary with regard to those Passions which may be particularly strong in us, and which we may have found in Experience to have the greatest Influence in seducing us into Practices, which in the most serious Judgment of our Minds we must always disapprove and condemn. As there is hardly any Man who has not certain Inclinations and Passions more remarkably prevalent in him than others; and as the greatest Danger to the Liberty of his Mind is to be apprehended from the Influence of these violent Passions, it is plain that for maintaining our spiritual Freedom, we must particularly watch their Motions, and do all we can to restrain them and keep them within proper Bounds. If we can regulate these well, it will be an easy matter to keep all our other Desires and Affections in a due Subjection, and to attain to a State of perfect Liberty; whereas if we could moderate all our other Passions, and indulged only one favou-

SERM. rite Inclination contrary to the Judgment of  
 XIV. our higher Faculties, we shall discover the  
 ~~~~~ Feebleness and Impotency of our Souls; that  
 we are really in a state of inward Slavery, and
 in constant Danger of having more and great-
 er Breaches made upon the Liberty of our
 Minds, till it comes to be totally ruined and
 lost.

2. Another necessary Direction for ac-
 quiring and preserving the Liberty of our
 Minds, is to have always what our Saviour
 Matt. vi. recommends under the Notion of a *single Eye*,
 23. an uncorrupted and clear Discernment in all
 the Affairs of Religion and Morality. For
 our moral Judgment being the Guide and
 Light of Life, the Principle which must con-
 duct us in the Paths of Liberty and Virtue,
 whatever darkens or corrupts that, strikes at
 the Foundation of our spiritual Freedom,
 and so far as it prevails makes the Enjoyment
 of that Freedom impossible. Now as there
 are several things which tend to obscure and
 deprave the Light and Judgment of our Con-
 sciences, such as indulged evil Passions, moral
 Refinements and Equivocations, supersti-
 tious and enthusiastick Opinions, and par-
 tial inadequate Conceptions of the Duties of
 Morality; we must, if we would secure the
 Liberty of our Minds, guard against all these
 Causes

Causes of spiritual Blindness and Depravity. SERM.

I have shewn under the former Direction XIV.

how our Passions are to be moderated and subdued, and consequently how the Influence of them in corrupting our Consciences is to be removed. And as for the other things which are apt to mislead and pervert the Judgment of our Consciences, we must guard against them by attending steadily to the natural Suggestions of our Minds with respect to the moral Duties of Life, which in all common Cases will be sufficient to lead us to a liberal and worthy Behaviour; and by a diligent Exercise of our Reason, in informing ourselves concerning the true Nature of God, and the acceptable Methods of serving him, and in acquiring just and extensive Views of publick Good and the true Interests of Men; and by comparing our Conduct with what our Reason teaches us to be the most effectual means of promoting the Honour of God, and the Happiness of our Fellow-Creatures. This close Attention to the natural Voice of our Consciences, and this vigorous Exercise of our Reason in discovering the most proper Methods of serving God, and of doing good to Mankind, are the only means for keeping clear of those Deceits and Artifices which Men of dishonest Hearts are

SERM. apt to make use of for concealing from them-

XIV. selves the Deformity of their Conduct, and rendering their Vices more agreeable and easy to their Minds; and for preventing the Delusions and Extravagancies occasioned by Superstition, and by enthusiastick, false, and partial Notions of Virtue, which are often utterly inconsistent with the Liberty and Integrity of the Mind; and will always enable us to perceive very readily the true Measures of our Duty, and to act with Consistency, Freedom, and Dignity in our whole Conversation and Behaviour.

3. Lastly, that we may maintain the Liberty of our Minds, let us always live under a deep and lively Sense of the Doctrines and Principles of the Gospel. This is a Direction which arises very obviously from the Words of our Saviour in the Text, where he represents the Freedom of our Souls as the natural Effect of our Knowledge and Belief of his Doctrines; and from St. James's giving to Christianity the Character of a *perfect Law of Liberty*. And indeed whoever reflects upon the Nature of the Christian Institution; that the several Principles and Motives of it most apparently tend to put away all manner of Vice, and to promote and establish an universal and perfect Purity among Men;

Jam. i 25.

Men; and that besides this, it assures us of SERM.
the Direction and Assistance of the Holy Spirit. XIV.
rit in all our Endeavours to reform ourselves,
and to bear up under the Misfortunes of Life:
Whoever, I say, considers this, will easily
conclude that the Result of a true Belief of
our Saviour's Doctrine, and of a sincere Obe-
dience to his Laws, will be a perfect Liberty
and Rest of Mind. *The Law of the Spirit* Rom. viii.
of Life in Christ Jesus, will make us free²
from the Law of Sin and Death. Though
we may have been *the Servants of Sin*, yet Rom. vi.
no sooner shall we *obey from the Heart that* 17, 18.
Form of Doctrine which has been delivered to
us, than we shall be made free from Sin, and
become the Servants of Righteousness. We
shall find a Force and Efficacy in the Faith
of Christianity sufficient to restrain all our
evil Desires, to give us *a Victory over the* 1 John v.
World, and to raise us up to a spiritual and 6.
divine Course of Life, in following which
we shall always have the greatest Pleasure
and Enlargement of Heart that can be. So
that if we would secure and maintain our in-
ward Liberty, a very sure and effectual Ex-
pedient for this purpose will be to fix a firm
Belief of the Christian Religion in our Minds,
and to cherish and cultivate a vigorous Sense
of its excellent Principles; which is to be done
by

SER.M. by reflecting much on the intrinsic Goodness

XIV. and noble Design of it, to purify and exalt the human Nature, and render it compleatly happy; and by weighing well the Force and Solidity of the Arguments which prove the Divine Institution and Authority of the Gospel.

F I N I S.

30 JY 64

